



**Visions of the Suprarational:  
A Study of the Concept of Nous in the Works of Plato and  
St. Augustine of Hippo**

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## **Master's Thesis**

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The original, approved thesis was first published online by VID Specialized University at <https://vid.brage.unit.no/vid-xmlui/handle/11250/2678790> in September 2020. A slightly altered version of this thesis, with the above image of the painting by Ivan Aivazovsky added to the first page, was uploaded to the profile page at <https://vid.academia.edu/EdmundSchilvold> that same month, as well as to the author's home page at <https://edmund-schilvold.com>

This third edition of the thesis, published in August 2024, differs from the previous version in the following ways:

- Various minor orthographic errors have been corrected.
- A few of the quotes from Plato's and St. Augustine's writings that had to be removed from the thesis prior to its final submission in May 2020, due to the need to comply with the constraint on length, have been copied back into the text where they were originally placed, and where the approved thesis referred to their locations, but did not actually include them. Examples of these are *Confessions* X.27.38, II.6.12, XI.4.6 and XIII.38.53.
- The English translation of the “True Philosophy” quote (521c in Plato's *Republic/Politeia*) has also been returned to the text, for the sake of readers unfamiliar with Greek.
- The quote from St. Augustine's *De Trinitate* (XIV.19.26), where Aurelius Augustinus himself quotes a wonderful and most revealing part of the concluding section of the *Hortensius*, a lost work composed by the famous

Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero, has been expanded, so as to include most of Cicero's words, not only for the benefit of the reader, but for the sake of their future preservation.

- To those of Plato's Attic Greek terms that the original thesis only quoted in the forms they occur in the original texts I have now added the nominative or uninflected versions, as well as simple transliterations.
- A reference to an important part of Plato's *Sophist* – one I was unaware of while composing the original thesis – was added to page 101.
- The approved thesis had a word count of exactly 30,800. This corrected and expanded edition is roughly 1,000 words longer, for the reasons given above.

## **Abstract**

### **Abstract in English**

The question of the actual and exact *nature* of, on the one hand, the pre-Christian and Hellenic and, on the other, the Greco-Roman and Patristic Christian *conceptions* of the possibility of contact between the Human Mind and the Supreme Deity, as well as of the *objective reality* of the phenomena, the genera and the experiences they refer to, are considered by way of detailed analyses of the Attic Greek text of *Plato's Republic* (the *Politeia*) and the Latin texts of St. Augustine's *Confessions* and *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*), and also of various translations of these works. The *metaphysics*, the *cosmologies* and the *anthropologies* found by way of these studies are then compared to one another, and briefly contrasted with the widely held *presuppositions* of the present day and age, i.e. of *Modernity*.

### **Abstract (sammendrag) in Norwegian**

Spørsmålet om hva den egentlige og eksakte *beskaffenheten* til, på den ene siden, de førkristne og greske, og, på den andre siden, de gresk-romerske og patristisk kristne forestillinger om muligheten for kontakt mellom Menneskesinnet og Den høyeste Gud, samt om *den objektive eksistensen* til fenomenene, kategoriene og erfaringene de refererer til, undersøkes via detaljerte analyser av den attisk greske teksten for Platons *Staten* og de latinske tekstene for St. Augustins *Bekjennelser* og *Om Treenigheten*, samt ulike oversettelser av disse verkene. *Metafysikkene*, *kosmologiene* og *menneskesynene* funnet via disse studiene sammenlignes så med hverandre, og kontrasteres også kortfattet med de utbredte *antagelsene* til vår samtid og tidsånd, det vil si til *Moderniteten*.

### **Statement by Prof. Knut Alfsvåg**

“Edmund Schilvold wrote his master's thesis on [the topic of] the conception of *Nous* in Plato and Augustine. In it, he demonstrates great insight into the thinking of both Plato and Augustine, sees both similarities and dissimilarities between them, and is able to employ that insight in a critical analysis of the differently oriented metaphysics, cosmology and anthropology we have in [the age of] Modernity. Here he shows a philosophical and theological understanding on a level rarely seen.”

Translated into English from the following statement in Norwegian: “Edmund Schilvold skrev sin masteroppgave om forståelsen av *Nous* hos Platon og Augustin. Han demonstrerer der stor innsikt i både Platons og Augustins tenkning, ser både likheter og ulikheter mellom dem, og kan anvende den innsikten i en kritisk analyse av den annerledes orienterte metafysikk, kosmologi og antropologi vi har i Moderniteten. Han viser her filosofisk og teologisk forståelse på et nivå man sjelden finner.”

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# Chapter I

## Introduction, Overview and Definitions

### Presentation of the research problem

Is there such a thing – if “thing” it may be called – as a “suprarational” mental faculty or power, accessible to human beings, and capable of apprehending the Divine? If yes, then what is its true nature, and why does Modernity largely ignore it, and not infrequently even deny its existence? That, in brief, is the momentous issue this thesis is intended to shed light on.

It is, however, impossible to undertake a comprehensive and fully satisfactory survey of this issue in a paper limited to a length of circa 30,000 words, or the size of a thin book, as so doing would require an analysis encompassing, at the very least, dozens of major literary works, and several millennia of human history.

Hence, a thesis of this kind can only provide an introduction to the issue, and, perhaps, something like a blurry outline of an answer – and even that, I suppose, can only come into being if some higher power aids me on my way. Nevertheless, an outline is much more than the vast majority of people in the world of today ever usually see of this conundrum.

Due to the need for brevity, as well as the goal of achieving the greatest possible degree of certainty and clarity, I long since decided, when discussing this project with the supervisor, Prof. Knut Alfsvåg, to focus my attention on only two prominent thinkers in whose works the concept of a “suprarational” power is pronounced. I also decided that

those authors should be such as are widely held to have been part of the living “suprarational” tradition, and to have experienced the effects of that supposed power or faculty firsthand, and I likewise concluded that I should read some of their major works myself, if possible in the languages in which they were originally written, so as not to be a multiple of degrees removed from the presumed knowledge encapsulated in them.

### **The first thinker – Plato of Athens (428–348 B.C.)**

For reasons which, I hope, will become abundantly clear later on, the choice of the first thinker was, to my mind at least, not very difficult. It had to be Plato of Athens (428/427–348/347 B.C.), that towering figure embodying what we now tend to view as the first great flowering of Classical philosophy. This verdict of mine was mainly due of the remarkable content of some of his works, such as the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* (the ancient Greek title of which was reported by Diogenes Laertius (2024, 3.60), in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, to be *Politeia*, or *on the Just [Man]* (“Πολιτεία ἢ περὶ δικαίου”)), dialogues which I had not then studied in a very thorough manner, but which I nevertheless knew both spoke of and implied some extraordinary mental power.

There was also a personal reason behind that decision, however, for it was my encounter with Platonic philosophy, by way of the modern-day Platonist and teacher Dr. Pierre Grimes, which first awakened my interest in philosophy as a subject, roughly ten years ago now, in 2009.

That peculiar and gentle man, with his noble, suntanned visage and his snow-white beard, soon had my undivided attention – no mean feat, I should say, for I had a great host of interests in me then, all competing for attention. Yet I was nevertheless mesmerized by what I had found, for what Dr. Grimes gradually revealed and made plausible to me, was that philosophy, in the form of authentic, ancient Platonism, was something I had never



before anticipated that philosophy could be – namely *a road to God*, leading away from that ghastly and soul-withering modern “desolation of reality” (a term coined by the poet William Butler Yeats) now afflicting so many of our young, and into immense, immeasurable spiritual realms of beauty and wonder and hope.

## **The second thinker – St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 A.D.)**

I did not long hesitate to make my second choice either. The other thinker had to be Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430 A.D.), that celebrated and exceptionally prolific Father of the Church (and particularly of the Western churches).

I had not then examined any of St. Augustine’s larger works in the methodical manner I have now done, but I had listened my way through both *The City of God*, *Confessions* and *On the Trinity*, and I knew that St. Augustine treated of some of the same subjects as Plato did, albeit by way of a very different mode of writing.

What truly tipped the scales in favor of St. Augustine was, however, not any of that, but the honesty, the eloquence and the conceptual splendor I encountered in his *Confessions*. As the reader may already be aware of, *Confessions* is a profoundly personal work, but St. Augustine is, I think, one of those authors who show us that “personal” need not mean irrelevant to others, and that the realm of the supposedly subjective, when probed proficiently, begins to lead the investigator towards the Transpersonal, the Objective and the Universal – a paradox I shall return to later on.

Still, when I think of it, *Confessions* as a whole was not what made me love that saint whom I had never seen – what accomplished that was, strange as it may seem, almost only a single passage therein, namely this:

“Belatedly I loved thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new, belatedly I loved thee. For see, thou wast within and I was without, and I sought thee out there. Unlovely, I rushed heedlessly among the lovely things thou hast made. Thou wast with me, but I was not with thee. These things kept me far from thee; even though they were not at all unless they were in thee. Thou didst call and cry aloud, and didst force open my deafness. Thou didst gleam and shine, and didst chase away my blindness. Thou didst breathe fragrant odors and I drew in my breath; and now I pant for thee. I tasted, and now I hunger and thirst. Thou didst touch me, and I burned for thy peace.” (Conf. X.27.38)

Here, St. Augustine appeared to me to condense something inexpressibly complex and mysterious into a strikingly simple and stirring statement of Truth. I was won over.

### **The comparison and its advantages**

Now, by examining first Plato and then St. Augustine, the former of whom lived circa 400 years before the birth of Christ, and the latter of whom lived roughly as many years *after* that event, I would not only gain some insight into the ancient conceptions of the “suprarational” power mentioned above, but would also be able to draw a most interesting comparison between, on the one hand, a pre-Christian and *Hellenic* view, and, on the other hand, a Christian and late *Greco-Roman* view, separated by circa seven centuries.

Moreover, by thus analyzing some of the works of two of the foremost and most trustworthy sages of what might be styled the Western Tradition (even though the term “Western” is somewhat inaccurate and problematic), I would be able to determine, with some reasonable degree of certainty, whether a “suprarational” power in truth exists as an objective phenomenon or not – insofar as the limited amount of “data”, and the numerous constraints inherent in *the human condition*, allow for such an assessment at all.

## **An outline of the concept of Nous – and my journey towards it**

But what, then, is this “suprarational” power we are looking for evidence of and seeking knowledge of? What has it been called, and how has it been defined? As St. Augustine indirectly states in his *Confessions*, we cannot search for something if we have absolutely no idea of what it is that we are to search for.

In my case, I had read some of the works of Plato and St. Augustine in my early 30s without fully realizing what they stated and implied as regards human anthropology and the structure of the Human Mind – I had, according to my memory, merely some vague belief in the possibility of “mystical experiences” and “Divine Enlightenment”. It was only when I gained a dim notion of the power or faculty that is the subject of this thesis, and reread Plato’s *Politeia*, for example, that I began to see how much I had overlooked.

That notion was born, or rather awakened and articulated, when I came across a comment concerning Platonism which mentioned something called Nous. I had probably heard the term Nous mentioned in Dr. Grimes’ lectures without noticing it, but now it that caught my attention.

Ever since my late teens, I had been struggling to break out of, in a mental sense, the Materialism and Reductionism of the modern popular culture I had grown up in, and of the compulsory schooling system I had been obliged to attend (but which I had nevertheless embraced out of youthful ambition), and over the course of the first decade of this century, I had, in some measure, succeeded in *pecking a hole* in the shell of supposed impossibilities with which my Mind had become surrounded. Still, as recently as in 2015, I did not quite know how to proceed any further, nor did I see how I could express my inner experience *clearly*.

I was critical of what I sometimes styled “narrow-minded reason”, but I was not aware of

anything definite in terms of faculties beyond it. I spoke of and gave some weight to “feelings” and “ambiences”, but I did not know how to distinguish what I actually had in mind from the ordinary and everyday senses of those words. I had, when engaged in writing and meditation, and listening to music, or when dwelling on natural beauty in the great outdoors, experienced what some have called *altered* or *heightened* states of consciousness, but I was not sure just what those occurrences actually were. It was *inspiration* of some kind, but *what* was that inspiration?

When I encountered the above mentioned description of Nous, however, I immediately suspected that I had found a golden thread I could and should begin to follow. But it was not until I found and grasped the threefold distinction of Nous (νοῦς, Attic contraction of νόος), Dianoia (διάνοια, from διά and νόος) and Doxa (δόξα) – sometimes translated as “Intellect”, “Reason” and “Opinion” – that I sensed that I had made a breakthrough of some sort. I shall examine this in detail further on. For now, suffice it to say that imbibing that distinction was an almost *revelatory* experience. All of a sudden, I could begin to organize and express all the various strands of thought I had gathered on the subject of Mind or Consciousness.

One book made a great difference during that process of discovery – *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, by Fr. Andrew Louth (2007). It provided a well-written introduction to the subject of Nous – and also just about the only such introduction I could find – and made fascinating connections between concepts I had rarely, if ever, thought of *relating*, such as Intellect, intuition, heart, the Holy Spirit, the eye of the soul, etc.

It also pointed out (in Introduction and chapter III, for example) that the Hellenic term Nous can only with difficulty be translated, as it has no direct equivalent in English, and that there is a great linguistic confusion in this present day and age surrounding terms such as Intellect.

The latter struck me as very true, as I had never seen or heard Intellect used so as to signify the first part of the threefold distinction mentioned above – even though I had done well in school, and always taken an interest in languages, and devoted much of my adult life to writing.

## Definitions of some of the central terms employed in this thesis

Before we proceed to the central part of this paper, I suspect it will be of some value to have gone over, and to have collected in a single place, a list of some of the crucial terms I shall be employing, as well as the manner in which their meaning has been defined.

All Stephanus Numbers refer, unless otherwise noted, to those of the *Politeia*, better known as *Plato's Republic*.

**Being.** Plato's (τὸ) ὄν ((to) on) (477a–478e). When used without qualification, it denotes the whole of **the Intelligible Realm** (“τὸν νοητὸν τόπον”; ὁ νοητός τόπος, ho noetos topos, 517b), meaning the invisible, intangible, non-empirical, non-sensual “world”, the upper part of which is only perceptible to the purified and rekindled (527d–527e) Eye of the Soul (533c, 540a), and the lower part of which is the proper object of Reason or Understanding.

There are, in other words, two main levels of Being, corresponding to the two sections of the Intelligible (or *Noetic*) or Invisible. Here I shall refer to these two levels as **Higher Being** and **Lower Being**. These could, with some basis in the *Politeia*, be metaphorically described as Gold (503a, 547a, 547b) or Sunlight and Silver or Moonlight (516a), respectively. (For references to Non-Being, see 478c, 479c.)

For the sake of clarifying what they are, it is worth pointing out that ordinary education,

and the so-called arts and humanities and modern sciences, *never* deal with Higher Being, which is described as a “Waking Vision”, but *only* with Lower Being, which is described as “dreaming of Being” (511e, 533b). It is only the four Platonic Arts, which are likely four of the Pythagorean Arts (523a–530d), which prepare the student for awakening (Intellection or Noesis, νόσις, the opposite of bodily sensing, αἴσθησις (aisthesis)).

Higher Being is the realm of the famous Platonic Ideas (507c), which, it seems to me, are probably not mere impersonal and lifeless “forms”, but beings of the sort we would call lesser gods or angels. This is implied by the mentions of (the) **beings**, that is the term (τὸ) ὄν in the plural (“τῶν ὄντων”; τὰ ὄντα, 477c, 500b, 609b), in conjunction with this upper section of the Intelligible Realm.

Lastly, we should not neglect to notice that the term Ousia, οὐσία, the closest English equivalent of which is probably Essence, is used as synonymous with Being unqualified (479c, 509b, 534a), while the crucial term **That Which** (Wholly/Purely/Truly) **Is** (477a, 478a) always refers to Higher Being only.

**Becoming.** Plato’s γένεσις (genesis) – Generation/Genesis (518c, 534a, 611c). When unqualified, this stands for all of that which human beings (particularly in our day and age) tend to call “the world”, “the universe” and “reality”. This, in other words, is the “empirical” world (539e), the world of matter, and of sense-impressions (523b, 524d) originating in the five physical senses. It is also, as we know, or ought to know by now, the world in which the modern, Enlightenment-shaped sciences exist, and which, to them, is the only world it is permissible to deal with if one wants to be “scientific”, as it is the only world they view as “real” or “relevant”.

In the Platonic system, however, this world of Becoming is not the only reality at all, but merely one of the lowest and least “real” parts of a vast, unfathomable irradiation from

the Supreme Divinity, beginning with Higher Being and Luminous Clarity (478c, 509e, 479c) and That Which Is (477a, 485b, 597a), and ending in Non-Being, Obscurity and Un-Reality (509e, 478b–478c, 479c).

One could conceive of this metaphysical and cosmological schema as a great disk, resembling our physical solar system, where a sun, symbolizing the Idea of the Good, sits at the center, and where the region occupied by the planet orbiting the closest to the sun, where light is unmixed with darkness, corresponds to Higher Being. The further one then travels from there, and the more “planetary orbits” one crosses, the more the light fades in potency, so that, at long last, one arrives at the blurry outer edge of that great and variegated *mandala*, to use an Eastern term, beyond which cold and darkness – the equivalent of Non-Being – reigns unchecked. (C.f. Matthew 25:30)

This, by the way, is demonstrably the metaphysical model adopted by St. Augustine (as Conf. XI.4.6, for example, indicates), as we shall see later on.

As in the case of Being, there are two major planes of Becoming (one could also say of Generation), according with the upper and lower section of **the Realm of Opinion** (δόξα, 534a), which, in Plato, is the near antithesis of the Intelligible Realm, and also an *alternative designation* for Becoming, since there can be no such thing as *Knowledge* so long as one remains wholly preoccupied with Becoming. These two planes will be designated, respectively, **Higher Becoming** and **Lower Becoming**.

The former one is characterized by **Trust** (πίστις (pistis), 511e, 534a), or **Correct Belief** (“πίστιν ὀρθήν”; πίστις ὀρθή, 601e, “δόξαν ὀρθήν”, δόξα ὀρθή, 602a), which, as I interpret the matter, is like a kind of “shadow-knowledge”, as there seems to be an analogous relationship between the upper section of the Intelligible and the upper section of Opinion (534a).

Higher Becoming is also characterized, as I understand it, by the *likenesses* or *manifestations* of the Ideas. It is these manifestations or instantiations in matter later philosophers have sometimes called “the things themselves” (“die Dinge an sich”), or “the phenomena” outside of ourselves. In Plato’s Cave, they are the objects before the great fire (which is the physical sun of our solar system) casting the shadows seen by the prisoners (517b).

The latter plane of Becoming, which is yet another step or multiplication removed from Truth and Knowledge, and which represents the mental state most human beings are in, is equated with **Image-Thinking** (εἰκασία (eikasia), 534a). In this lower section or state of Opinion, one is only aware of the *phantasms* or *sense-impressions* generated by the presence of the manifestations spoken of above. These sense-impressions are represented as images flickering on the wall of the Cave before the prisoners, but this is clearly a metaphorical representation of *the Human Mind itself*, for it is a biological fact (which Plato was aware of, I think) that a human being in the ordinary state never actually sees the world without as it is “in itself” (“an sich”), but only the mental interpretations, the phantasms, of sense-impressions.

This does not mean that there is not a great deal of correspondence between the image of the world inside of us and the actual world outside of us – if there were not, it seems unlikely (unless we are willing to plunge headlong into total Solipsism, and claim that no external world exists) that we would have survived for very long – it only means that our inner image of the world is not *identical* to the outer world giving rise to it.

In Plato there is, however, as the reader may already be aware of, a path leading away from this captivity, away from shadows and phantasms, and towards Truth and Knowledge, but that path is not and *cannot* be physical, but is a *mental* path, leading, *at first*, into *oneself*, for one of the great paradoxes of the human condition – if we accept the Platonic schema – is that the only way to the outside, and to deliverance, goes via the



inside, and the only road away from oneself is a road into oneself. To summarize: As one in the *upper* section of the *Intelligible* (or Noetic) Realm, during Noesis, sees the Eternal Ideas *themselves*, so Trust enables one to “see through” the phantasms or sense-impressions (not in the sense of *actually seeing* through them, but of trusting that there are entities beyond them), and to “see” the world for what it actually is, and as one in the *lower* section of the *Intelligible* Realm, by Understanding, sees only the “reflections” of the Eternal Ideas (as in a mirror or body of water), so Image-Thinking only allows one to see the shadows or phantasms of actual entities.

**Knowledge.** Plato’s ἐπιστήμη (episteme). In Plato synonymous with **Gnosis** (γνώσις, 477a–477b, 478a – antonym ἀγνοσία, agnosia). Knowledge is one of the terms which in modern usage often signify almost the opposite of what Plato meant by it. Here it will always denote the kind of Knowledge which, in Platonism, is the only *real* Knowledge, namely that which is acquired by way of one of the two major Platonic modes of knowing – they seem to complement each other – namely **Intellection** or Noetic Vision (Noesis) and **Dialectics**.

This assessment of mine – that there are at least two paths to Platonic Knowledge – is one that I have later found to be supported by Proclus (412–485 A.D.). Or so it seems to me. For in chapter IV of his commentary on Platonic theology, Proclus states that Plato “appears not to have pursued everywhere the same mode of doctrine” concerning “mystic conceptions of divine natures”, and that he sometimes discloses the truth “according to a deific energy, and at other times dialectically”. (Proclus, 2010, p. 50) Moreover, by “deific energy”, he means Divine Inspiration (2010, p. 51), which I would equate with Noesis, and by Dialectics he means the method which “endeavors to arrive at the one itself”, “the nature of the good” (2010, p. 61), exemplified by the *Parmenides*. Hence, the *Parmenides* is not “a logical exercise”, but deals with “the science of the first principle” (2010, p. 60).

In sum, *Platonic* Knowledge is not a verbal or factual “addition” to one’s memory, but a breathtaking insight into the True Nature and the Causes of existence, which no verbal description can possibly do justice to.

**Intellection**, which could also be called **Noesis** (since it depends on Nous, and the Platonic term often translated as Intellection is νόησις, noesis), pertains to Higher Being, or the *upper* section of the Intelligible Realm, and is made *possible* by the Divine Light or Power emitted by the Idea of the Good. At its greatest height, the *event* of Intellection (Nous received and realized) becomes a vision of *the Idea* of the Good, or rather of the Divine Light radiated by it. That is why the gaining of Intellection is likened by Plato to the climbing out of a cave and beholding the light of the sun.

Dialectics, on the other hand, appears to be a process of profound analysis, leading to the realization that there *has to be* – and indeed *is* – something beyond (509b) Divine Light and the Idea of the Good, and therefore beyond even Higher Being and the upper section of the Intelligible Realm, namely the Good Itself. It is *implied* that this Divine entity is identical to the One. It is also called the Father (506e).

This realization is, however, paradoxical, in the sense that it is an apprehension of something which does not exist – not in the usual sense of that word – since it is clearly described as subsisting beyond Essence and Being (509b). If we were to indulge in word games, we could say that it is “absolutely nothing”, in the sense of “no *thing* whatsoever” – and yet, that nothing is, nevertheless, the greatest “something” there is, as it is the only first and self-sufficient Cause of everything there is.

From this, there is but a step – albeit a *significant* one, perhaps – to speaking of a Divine, “supraessential” Essence, as Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius (also known as St. Dionysius the Areopagite) would do roughly 900 years later. Proclus, for example, speaking of the

First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, states that “almost all agree in asserting that Plato through this celebrates the superessential principle of wholes, as ineffable, unknown, and above all being” (2010, Ch. X, p. 62). (As for the second of the two, see: Dionysius, 1920, p. 51 ff.). It is also a concept which is somewhat reminiscent of the Ein Sof (אין סוף, “that of which nothing can be said”) of Esoteric Judaism.

The existence of the Good or the One, the Father and the First Cause, could also, incidentally, be inferred from the appellation the Idea of the Good (“ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα”; ἡ ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, 505a, 508e, 517b–517c, 534c). For the word Idea is the Hellenic ἰδέα, which is closely related to εἶδω, “I see” or “I behold”, and εἶδος, which *can* mean beautiful appearance or countenance (LSJ; Beekes, 2010, pp. 379–380, 577), so that Idea, in this setting, could be taken to mean the appearance or “showing” of the Good. But if that is the case, then it is clearly not the Good as it is “in itself”.

Moreover, if the Idea of the Good is the Provider of Intellect (506d –509a, 517c), and it is the Idea of the Good that makes the Intelligible Realm possible (509a), then it cannot itself be *part of* the Intelligible Realm, or *be* Intellect, I suppose, since that which causes or creates something cannot itself *be*, or be *part of*, that which is caused or created.

**Understanding.** Plato’s διάνοια (dianoia). In modern parlance, “understanding” does not have a *specific* meaning. It often means knowledge, or a degree of knowledge, but that “knowledge” usually has little or nothing to do with Platonic Knowledge. Here Understanding will refer to that faculty or power of the Mind which has as its proper object Lower Being, or the lower section of the Intelligible Realm.

It is important to note that this is *not* the realm of the Eternal Ideas themselves (507c), and hence not the realm of the Truly Above (“το ἀληθως ανω”, 584d) – which is the End or Goal of Platonic philosophy – but only a realm of reflections (532c) – a “middle” or

“in between” realm, as it is called (584d). (C.f. John 8:23) That actually makes the English term “under-standing” suitable, for the role of Understanding in Plato is precisely that – a “standing under” that which is far greater, in a position naturally subordinate to that of the Eye of the Soul (a term which will be explained later on) and Noesis.

Almost all modern, Enlightenment-affected philosophy takes place, as is evident to anyone who examines it, within the realm of Understanding only. Hence, it is not philosophy in the Platonic sense at all, but only a sort of “shadow-philosophy” or faint *likeness* of philosophy.

Understanding and Reason will here be used as equivalents.

**Intellect.** A common translation of Plato’s νοῦς (nous) (Attic contraction of νόος, noos). Here I will consistently use the English transliteration **Nous** instead of Intellect, as the term “intellect” as now commonly used in English has no very specific meaning, and not infrequently refers to the reasoning or understanding power, which is not at all what Nous is here intended to signify. Hence, I think the use of a different and more unfamiliar term will aid in the comprehension of that which I shall be attempting to explicate.

**Intelligible.** This is how Platonic terms which refer to the realms of the invisible, such as νοητός (noetos), are often translated. Here I shall be using the transliteration **Noetic** instead. Where the adjective is part of a term signifying a “location”, as in (“τὸν νοητὸν τόπον”; ὁ νοητός τόπος, 517b), I shall be using the term **the Realm of the Noetic**. This is never a physical location, but always denotes either the whole of or a part of **the Realm of Being**, which, as we have seen, consists of two states or planes, Higher and Lower.

The latter is not central to our discussion of Nous, but the former is, as it is the level of

the Eternal Ideas, and of the Divine Light emitted by the Idea of the Good – the journey into which is the essence of all **True Philosophy**:

“βούλει οὖν τοῦτ’ ἤδη σκοπῶμεν, τίνα τρόπον οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἐγγενήσονται, καὶ πῶς τις ἀνάξει αὐτοὺς εἰς φῶς, ὥσπερ ἐξ Ἄιδου λέγονται δὴ τινες εἰς θεοὺς ἀνελθεῖν;

πῶς γὰρ οὐ βούλομαι; ἔφη.

τοῦτο δὴ, ὡς ἔοικεν, οὐκ ὁστράκου ἂν εἴη περιστροφή, ἀλλὰ ψυχῆς περιαγωγή ἐκ νυκτερινῆς τιнос ἡμέρας εἰς ἀληθινήν, τοῦ ὄντος οὕσαν ἐπάνοδον, ἣν δὴ **φιλοσοφίαν ἀληθῆ** φήσομεν εἶναι.

πάνυ μὲν οὖν.”

(521c)

“Do you want us now to consider in what way such men will come into being and how one will lead them up to the light, just as some men are said to have gone from Hades up to the gods?”

“How could I not want to?” he [Glaucón] said.

“Then, as it seems, this wouldn't be the twirling of a shell but the turning of a soul around from a day that is like night to the true day; it is that ascent to what is which we shall truly affirm to be philosophy.”

“Most certainly.”

(521c, the Allan Bloom translation)

This Higher Realm of the Noetic could also be called the Heavenly Realm or the Kingdom, for the Eternal Ideas are spoken of as existing in Heaven (592b), and the *Politeia* clearly connects concepts such as Kingship, Noesis and the Ideas, for the kingly individual is one *governed by the philosophic part* (587e), and the Ideas are correlated with that which is *royal* (“*βασιλεως*”; *βασιλεύς* (basileus), 597e).

**Mind.** By this I mean the whole aggregate of innate human mental powers and processes which, in contemporary, imprecise language, is often styled consciousness. This is *not*, in other words, *Nous*. Put in Platonic terms, this definition means that “Mind” encompasses both the *wisdom-loving* or philosophic, the *honor-loving* or martial and the *gain-loving* or appetitive parts – the three foremost parts of a human being in the *Politeia* (435a–435e, 441c, 443d–443e, 571d–572a, 580d, 581c) – which correspond, somewhat imperfectly, to the Eye of the Soul *and* Understanding, the will and the desires, respectively.

This threefold schema, and the fact that it is applicable in *three* ways – to the *external* city, as a way of denoting *natural* social *categories*, and to the *metaphorical city within*, as way of signifying *psychological constellations*, and, lastly, as a way of describing dominant psychological *states*, as they differ from person to person, is a crucial theme in the *Politeia*, but to elaborate on it here would constitute a digression. This theme is itself deserving of a thesis, though, for it could be called the first extensive articulation in recorded history of a schema for what we would call psychological analysis and psychotherapy.

**Reason.** Plato’s *διάνοια* (*dianoia*). Here, the term will signify the same mental faculty or power as **Understanding**. This means that our Reason will be assigned a role quite different from that of Modern Reason, as it will refer to a faculty which, while important, is nevertheless subordinate in rank and power to that of **the Eye of the Soul**, which, as I interpret the *Politeia*, is the first and highest of all the *human* mental faculties. Within Modernity, on the other hand, this same Reason is given the role of supreme arbiter of all human affairs – whether internal and psychological or external and cultural. Philosophy is usually conceived of as consisting in the exercise of Reason, or “Discursive Reason”, as it is sometimes called, and even religion is frequently thought of as a phenomenon which ought to conform to the principles of and be explicable in terms of Reason.

This must not be taken to mean that I view Reason as bad or unnecessary. The problem is not Reason *in itself*, but the excessive weight and authority it has been given, and the improper uses it has been put to, since around the time of the Enlightenment.

This situation is actually closely related to the concept in the *Politeia* usually translated as *Justice* – or rather the lack thereof – for Justice (δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosune) in the *Politeia* is not the modern notion of equality, in the sense of equal ability or sameness, but the state of *harmony* and *concord* and *well-being* which comes into existence, in both the individual and in human society, when each and every part is performing the functions proper to its nature (433a–433b, 441d, 443d, 571e–572a).

In the case of the individual, that means, ideally, that all the four major cognitive powers – the Eye of the Soul, the Understanding, Trusting and Image-Thinking, are arranged in a hierarchy, according to the positions proper to them, so that each of them is fulfilling its natural set of tasks, and so that they together are acting in unison, under the guidance of the one which is the wisest and most kingly of them all, so that the individual is made, as a result, “out of many (...) one” (443e).

**Soul.** Plato’s ψυχή (psyche). This is the invisible, immaterial spiritual entity which, together with the physical body, constitutes a living or incarnated human being, and which survives and lives on after bodily death. According to Plato, the Soul is one of the Eternal Beings (611a–611b), and it may be inferred, from what he says of it elsewhere in the *Politeia*, that the Soul remains an Everlasting, Noetic Being even while joined to the physical body of a human being living on Earth. Granted, the Soul is sometimes said to journey to this or that location, but these statements, I suspect, should be seen as ways to metaphorically convey changes to its “orientation”, since Higher Being clearly lies beyond both our three spatial dimensions and our one temporal, chronological dimension.

Incidentally, this doctrine of the Soul *always* remaining in the Realm of the Noetic, even while incarnated in the Below, is also recognizable in some Christian thinkers, including St. Augustine of Hippo (D.Tr. IV.20.28), where there also exists the somewhat similar, but far more prominent doctrine of the Eternal Word always remaining immutably in Eternity, even while involved in the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection taking place in Time (D.Tr. II.9.15, D.Tr. IV.21.31).

Such seemingly impossible conjunctions of opposites are rendered conceivable by the nature of the Realm of Higher Being, for since it has no physical or temporal location (at least not in the sense of being a three-dimensional place in Time), it is, in a way, “everywhere”, right “behind” whatever point we choose in Time and Space.

Hence, physical embodiment does not, it seems, actually entail a change in the “location” of the Soul, but only a change in “focus” – whatever that actually means – and that is why the would-be Lover of Wisdom only needs to turn the Eye of the Soul around, as Plato puts it, from that which is Below to that which is Above, and why there is no need to have the soul “travel” to a different “place”.

**Nous.** Plato’s νοῦς (nous, Attic contraction of νόος). This, as I have already indicated, is what this inquiry is primarily about. So as not to reveal too much too early, before the argument has been laid out, and the framework wherein Nous is located has been grasped, it will presently only be defined as (1) a metaphysical *entity* or *genus* belonging to Higher Being, and (2) as a potential which is realized when the above mentioned genus is received by the Eye of the Soul, when that Eye has been purified, and is turned towards that which is Truly Above.

A possible analogy might be that of the seeds for a beautiful flower, which, in a sense, are self-contained, and in need of nothing, but which, when landing in fertile and well-prepared soil, give rise to wonderful flowerings, while nevertheless remaining distinct



from the soil itself. The difference between Nous and Noesis lies in whether the emphasis is on the *entity itself* or the *act* in which it is received.

## **Capitalization**

As the reader is bound to notice at some point, I have chosen to consistently capitalize a number of terms which are not usually capitalized in contemporary English. The rationale behind this decision is twofold. In the first place, I would say that it increases legibility, as it makes some of the most important terms easier to spot in the text. In the second place, it signals to the reader that the term in question is one belonging to a higher order, such as Higher Being in the case of Nous, or an overarching temporal concept in the case of Modernity.

## **Calendar systems**

In this thesis, I have deliberately chosen to uphold the traditional European way of clarifying the position of a given year, namely that of assigning to it the marker of either B.C. (Before Christ) or A.D. (Anno Domini). I see no good reason why we should abandon a dating convention which, in our part of the world, has been almost universally accepted for centuries, and then replace it with one which avoids acknowledging the historical reason why we have the system we have, while at the same time leaving the reckoning itself unchanged.

## Formatting

Any **emphasis** or *italicization* in the texts quoted is *always* an *added* one. Greek or Latin words or phrases in (parentheses) *within* a quote from an English translation are usually the actual, and therefore frequently inflected, words of the original text, while words in [brackets] *within* a quote are an added comment. Words or phrases in Latin or Greek given outside of translation quotes are the actual words of a text when placed between “quotation marks”, and the nominative or uninflected versions (i.e. the versions one would search for in dictionaries) of such when not placed between such marks.

## Referencing

All references to Plato’s dialogues are given in the form of (*Greek Title Transliterated* Stephanus Number), as in (*Politeia* 362a), while all references to St. Augustine’s works are given in the form of (Abbreviated Title. Book.Chapter.Section) as in (D.Tr. II.1.2).

## Chapter II

# The Eye of the Soul and Nous in Plato

### The problem of Reality and Reproduction

I now move on to a more thorough examination of the thought of Plato of Athens (428/427–348/347 B.C.), the first of the two prominent thinkers I mentioned in the introduction. In executing this investigation, I shall mainly be relying on texts composed by Plato himself, such as those found in the *Politeia* and the *Phaedrus*, as an inquiry of the kind I propose to carry out clearly necessitates an analysis of primary sources – including the language those sources were originally written in. Anything short of that would amount to “imitation” of the sort deplored by Plato as three or more stages removed from the reality that first engendered the “reproduction” that is Generation or Becoming (597c–602d).

Let me explain what I mean by that. If we assume that Plato *himself* encountered Higher Being, then the literary productions where he sets forth his experiences constitute the first level of “imitation”, and stand in a relation to Higher Being which is similar to that of the *manifestations* of the Eternal Ideas in this material world – manifestations which, I surmise, correspond to the entities later thinkers (like Immanuel Kant) have sometimes called “the things themselves” or “die Dinge an sich”.

When Plato’s Attic Greek recordings are translated, and thereby inevitably interpreted and altered, the second stage of “imitation”, comparable to the sense-impressions caused by encounters with manifestations, is reached. If that were the end of the process of “reproduction”, the distance between the original Event and its final “image” would,

perhaps, be acceptable. But the process often continues, for in many cases, someone relies on a translation, or translations, as the basis for an entirely new literary work, authored by themselves, in which they endeavor to interpret Plato in whatever way they view as desirable. This then becomes the third stage of “imitation”, censured by Plato as “shadow-painting” (602d), as it imitates mere “shadows”, and not even actual manifestations. The distance between this third stage and the Reality which led to the first “act of creation” can clearly be a problem, and leads to the unavoidable mixing of Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη or γνῶσις) with significant amounts of Ignorance (ἀγνοσία).

Yet the process frequently proceeds even further. The more well-written interpretations of Plato, themselves based on interpretations, become popular introductions to the subject – but *not* the *practice* – of Platonism, not only because ordinary people tend to shy away from the reading of the works of the ancient thinkers themselves because they fear those works will be too difficult for them, but because there is money and prestige and power to be garnered from the playing of the role as “intermediary”. Those mediatory works, thrice removed from that which Plato once beheld, then originate various “schools” of interpretation, which go on to spawn a multitude of works yet another stage distanced from Reality. By now the fourth stage of “imitation” has been reached, and now the Beginning (533c) seen by Plato has been so distorted and obscured and mixed with darkness that one is approaching utter Ignorance.

The sort of *opining* described above is, unfortunately, what many now engage in, both in academia and in life in general. As regards Plato, this is clearly the reason for the considerable variety of views concerning fundamental Platonic “doctrines”, such as that of the Eternal Ideas, for Plato himself is usually quite unambiguous. His language is, generally speaking, simple and unaffected, and almost wholly devoid of the sort of novel and sophisticated jargon permeating much of contemporary learned discourse. Surprisingly to some, he even likes to employ startling literary devices, such as humor and irony and daring oaths, in his dialogues.

As someone once said: That which is clearly thought, is also clearly taught – or wrought – and obscurity is not usually a mark of intelligence, but either of its opposite, or of some *end* other than the Truth. The main difficulty in reading Plato lies in finding the time and the patience to read the protracted arguments all the way through to their conclusions, and to read *all* of a given dialogue, and not merely parts of it.

Plato also speaks as one having *experience* – even though he tends to ascribe all his insights to Socrates – and his works are therefore imbued with a certain *authority*. The dialogues are not nihilistic explorations which could go anywhere, but sophisticated ways of gently guiding the reader towards the recognition of certain magnificent conceptions and convictions, the future perpetuation of which are their sole “raison d’être”, and the holding of which can only have come from first-hand encounters with something far exceeding the “subject matter” of *Dianoia*.

## **The Enigma of Nous**

With that said, let us delve into Plato’s answer to the question of whether there is such a “thing” as a suprarational faculty or power. However, I must first be permitted to rephrase that initial question somewhat, since I have come to appreciate that it is actually rather incorrect to describe that which we are after, *Nous*, as a mental faculty or power, and that *Noesis* is not so much an act as an *event*, requiring the interplay between at least three rather different “actors” or “genera”. Hence, a better question is this:

**“What is the Eye of the Soul, and what is *Nous*, and what is the relation between them?”**

I shall begin with the first term, the Eye of the Soul “τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα”; τὸ ὄμμα τῆς ψυχῆς (533d). But to see what that refers to, we first need to grasp what Plato means by

the Soul, ἡ ψυχή (he psyche). I have already said something of that in the introduction, but allow me to expand on that here.

## The Immortality of the Individual Soul

In this case – that of the Eye of the Soul – we are evidently dealing with the Soul of *the human individual* (or rather with the soul that *is* an individual, and incarnates in a physical body), and the view of the individual Soul revealed in the *Politeia* is that it is an immortal (ἄθάνατος, athanatos) and eternal (ἄϊδιος, aidios) spiritual entity, belonging to the Realm of Higher Being, and thus akin to the Divine. For in the memorable first climax (608d) of the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon concerning the soul (608c–612b), Socrates says the following:

“Have you not perceived that our soul is immortal, and never destroyed?”

To this Glaucon replies with amazement:

“By Zeus, I have not! But can you affirm this?”

Then, a little later in the discussion (611a), the Soul is affirmed to *always be* (“ἄεί ον”), and to be *one of the Beings* (c.f. 609b, “τῶν ὄντων”), which is equivalent to saying that it belongs to the upper section of the Realm of the Noetic – to That Which Is. Towards the concluding part of the exchange, moreover, it is stated that the Soul is *akin* to the Divine (“συγγενὴς οὖσα τῷ τε θεῷ”, 611e).

It is noteworthy that Glaucon is portrayed as reacting with complete astonishment to Socrates’ announcement of the immortality of the individual soul. This would seem to imply that the indestructibility of the soul (“οὐδέποτε ἀπόλλυται”, “never destroyed”,

608d) was not a widely held conviction in Athens at the time.

## **The Divine Image in Plato – the body is not the true human being**

Now that we have established what the Platonic view of the human Soul is, we may proceed to an analysis of what the Eye of the Soul is. However, before we do that, I would like to point out the presence in the *Politeia* of something which is surprisingly reminiscent of the celebrated doctrine of the Image of God (the *Imago Dei*). Let us see what Plato has to say concerning the matter:

“ἔπειτα οἶμαι ἀπεργαζόμενοι πυκνὰ ἂν ἐκατέρωσ’ ἀποβλέποιεν, πρὸς τε τὸ φύσει δίκαιον καὶ καλὸν καὶ σῶφρον καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα, καὶ πρὸς ἐκεῖν’ αὖ τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐμποιοῖεν, συμμειγνύντες τε καὶ κεραννύντες ἐκ τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων **τὸ ἀνδρείκελον**, ἀπ’ ἐκείνου τεκμαιρόμενοι, ὃ δὴ καὶ Ὅμηρος ἐκάλεσεν **ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐγγιγνόμενον θεοειδές** τε καὶ **θεοείκελον**.” (501b)

As for translation, this passage appears to be one of the cases where there is a significant amount of disagreement concerning what the central terms signify. Still, we may note the correspondence between the term “ἀνδρείκελον”, which tends to be rendered “image of man” (but which can also mean pigment of a color resembling human skin), and “θεοείκελον”, which tends to be rendered “godlike”, but which, it would seem, could also be rendered as “the image of god”, as in the Allan Bloom translation, or as “the Divine Resemblance”, as in the Balboa translation.

I propose the following, which is mainly based on the comments on this passage by the classicist James Adam (1860–1907):

“Afterwards, I think, as they [the philosophic rulers] proceed in their work, they will frequently look both ways [‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’], first towards the True Natures of Justice and Beauty and Health, and all such, and then towards that which they are implanting in human beings [in their city], by mixing and

blending [as it were] their institutions, so as to ‘paint’ the likeness of a true human being inside of them [the human beings], from that ‘stamp’, which Homer indeed also [as I, Socrates] calls the Divine image and the Divine likeness appearing in human beings.” (501b, c.f. 484c–484d)

What does this mean? Elsewhere in the *Politeia*, Plato likens the *highest* of the three major parts of a living human being to just that – a human being (“the inner human being”, 588d, 589a) – while the two lower parts are likened, respectively, to a lion (588d) and a many-headed, snake-like beast (588c, 590b). In other words, it is only the highest part of a human being *in this world* (a Soul incarnated in a physical body) that is deserving of the label of Human (or Man), for only that highest part is *truly* human.

How so? If we consider the Platonic doctrine of the Eternal Ideas, it is, presumably, because only *that part* is akin to the Divine “Image” or the Divine *Idea* of Man in the Truly Above – and “the inner human being” is indeed called “perhaps (...) Divine” (589d) and “the most Divine part” (589e).

The commentary on the *Politeia* by James Adam supports the proposition that there is a concept resembling the “Imago Dei” in Plato, for of the first passage (501b), he says as follows:

“The legislative painter looks now at his model (the φύσει δίκαιον etc.), now at his picture (...). He combines and mixes various ἐπιτηδεύματα or institutions, till he produces the true ἀνδρείκελον or ‘colour and likeness of true Manhood’; just as the painter mixes various colours to produce his ἀνδρείκελον or flesh-tint. (...)

To this Plato of course alludes, but he intends us also to take the word in its etymological signification, as is clear from θεοεἶκελον below. The stress in ἀνδρείκελον, as in θεοειδές and θεοεἶκελον, is on the first part of the compound: it is not the mere ἀνθρωποειδές, but the Man-like, at which the legislator aims (...).

By the words τὸ ἀνδρείκελον–θεοεἶκελον Plato means to suggest that Man is then most manlike when he most resembles God: and (as Tennyson says) ‘then most godlike being most a man.’ (...) This sure and abiding conviction of the presence



of a divine element within us, rendering our nature essentially and truly human, makes itself felt in nearly all the dialogues of Plato.”

Of the second passage (589d), Adam makes these remarks:

“The doctrine of a θεῖόν τι ἐν ἡμῖν was by no means new to Greek philosophical and religious thought (...), but Plato gave it a far deeper meaning than it ever had before.”

Is this human being *within* more or less identical to the Soul already spoken of? So it would appear, but Plato does not explicitly make that connection in the *Politeia*, and in his comparison of the Soul to the mythical sea deity Glaucon (611c–611e), he seems to be saying that we cannot now achieve an exhaustive Knowledge of what the True Nature of the Soul is, as we cannot, in this earthly life, break entirely free of all the limitations inherent in Becoming.

## **The Eye of the Soul – a vessel for Divine Light**

Now we are finally ready to move on to the Platonic doctrine of the Eye of the Soul (533c, 540a), the grasping of which is, as far as I am able to judge, absolutely essential if one wants to understand Nous.

One of the first questions that arise is this: Is this Eye the same “entity”, for lack of a better term, as the inner eye we are all aware of as that mysterious “something” within us that enables us to continually “see” thoughts, memories and conjectures – even while we are also seeing that which we experience as the *external* world with our two physical eyes?

It seems probable, since the Eye, which is repeatedly referred to as the Organ (“τό ὄργανον” (to organon), 518c, 527d–527e), is spoken of as being turned towards

Becoming (518c), towards the Realm of Opinion, so long as one is in the natural or ordinary state – which is why the Art of the Turning Around of the Soul (518d) is necessary. For an orientation towards Becoming would appear to entail that the Eye normally only sees the “phantasms” or “shadows” generated by or evolving out of sense-perception – and that is indeed the activity we all know our inner eye is usually engaged in.

The Eye of the Soul is, however, capable of seeing far greater things than those belonging to Becoming. Not even the things of Understanding come close to the great metaphorical heights that the Eye is capable of perceiving. That is why Plato says that this Organ of the Soul is more valuable – “better worth saving” – than *innumerable* physical eyes (“κρειττον σωθηναι μυριων ομυτων”, 527e, c.f. 520c). Only the Eye of the Soul is able to behold the Truth (“αληθεια”, 527e) of Higher Being. (C.f. Mark 9:47, Matthew 18:9)

The great challenge facing those who would like to attain to that vision of Higher Being is that the standard orientation of the Eye, as already noted, is one where it is gazing “downwards” (519b) into Becoming – even when one is admiring the stars! (529a –529c) This situation, unless corrected, leads to the complete burying of this Organ in the “bog” of Becoming (533d), and, eventually, to the virtual extinction (527d–527e) of its ability to perceive the upper section of the Realm of the Noetic.

I say “virtual” since the Soul, as we have seen, is immortal and indestructible, and it therefore seems unlikely that one of its organs can be entirely annihilated by anything worldly.

Upon physical death, this state leads to what is described as a descent into Hades, where one enters into a deep sleep (534c) – presumably not forever in most cases, though, but only for a thousand years (615a), since the vast majority of Souls have then done sufficient penance for their sins (615a –615b), and are then thrust into a another

incarnation (621). A few Souls, however – those who are utterly incorrigible, or who have done such unspeakable acts of evil that they can never be atoned for, are consigned to perpetual punishment in *Tartarus* (615e).

In order to avoid such fates, and prepare the Eye of the Soul for visions of Higher Being, and for Communion (ὁμιλία, *homilia*) with the Divine (500c) – the End of true philosophy (505a, 521c) – it is necessary to engage in a series of steps which are metaphorically described as the gradual extraction of the Eye of the Soul from the “bog” of Opinion (533d).

They are also outlined as the purification and rekindling of that Eye (527d–527e), and to sum up that transformation in a memorable way, Plato employs a most interesting parable, namely that of the washing and dyeing of a woolen garment. As he says, before a woolen garment may be dyed (bathed in) a bright and genuine purple (“αλουργα”; ἀλουργής), which will never fade away, regardless of what it is exposed to, it must be first be prepared and made white (429d–429e). (C.f. Mark 15:17)

It would be hard not to notice the similarity between this “washing and dyeing” and the well-known religious ritual of baptism, where the concept of purification is certainly present, and the “rekindling” could be said to consist in the new relationship supposedly established between the baptized human being and the Divine. Incidentally, the verb translated as “dye” is identical to that which is at the root of the verb “baptize”.

It is also highly significant that the color chosen for the dyeing is that of a true – probably Tyrian – purple, for that color was universally associated with royalty and authority in the ancient Mediterranean world, and this fits perfectly with the relationship established by Plato between kingship (both psychological and external) and Higher Being (509d, 585e, 587b, 587d). (True Kingship is said to be *729 times* loftier in nature than the enslavement of oneself and others that is tyranny, 587e.)

Finally, I think is worth pointing out that the word translated as “rekindled” (527e) is “ἀναζωπυρεται” (from ἀναζωπυρέω), which contains the word for *fire*, πῦρ (pur) – and that purple could, with some imagination at least, be called “fire-like”.

These steps constitute the Art of the Turning Around of the Soul (“τέχνη (...) τῆς περιαγωγῆς”, 518d ff.), which I cannot describe in detail here. It includes the four Platonic or Pythagorean (530d) Arts of “Arithmetic” (525a), “Geometry” (526d–527c), “Cubes” (528b) and “Astronomy” (528d–528e). None of these studies are identical to the ordinary studies we tend to associate with those names, however. Platonic Astronomy, for example, has nothing to do with the stars of this material universe, but is the study of that which is Truly Above, namely the Eternal Ideas of Higher Being. That is why it is *likened* to astronomy. The Ideas are, in some respects, *like* stars, and the upper section of the Realm of the Noetic is, in some ways, *like* the heavens, but the Ideas are not stars, but Beings (509b), and the upper Realm of the Noetic is not the heavens, but the luminous Kingdom of the Idea of the Good.

## **The dependence of the Eye of the Soul on the Divine**

Let us now assume that all of the above has been carried out, so that the Eye of the Soul has been detached from Becoming and turned towards Higher Being. May this spiritual Organ of the Soul now begin to have visions of and behold That Which Is without external aid? Plato’s answer to this is quite clearly no. By itself, the Eye of the Soul is helpless, and unable to see anything of Higher Being whatsoever.

But *what*, then, is it that the Eye is in need of? The answer is, in a way, obvious. However, let us first see how Plato explains the confluence of factors which enable the Eye to behold the Eternal Ideas.

A hint of the nature of the relationship between an ordinary human being and Nous is, perhaps, given in Book VI in the *Politeia*, where, during a discussion of the danger of corruption facing human beings of *the philosophic nature* (494a–494b), Socrates says the following:

“τῷ δὴ οὕτω διατιθεμένῳ ἐάν τις ἡρέμα προσελθὼν τάληθῃ λέγῃ, ὅτι νοῦς οὐκ ἔνεστιν αὐτῷ, δεῖται δέ, τὸ δὲ οὐ κτητὸν μὴ δουλεύσαντι τῇ κτήσει αὐτοῦ, ἄρ’ εὐπετέες οἶε εἶναι εἰσακοῦσαι διὰ τοσούτων κακῶν; (...)” (494d)

“Then if one should gently approach a person of this disposition and tell him the truth, namely that **he has no Nous in him**, even though he is in need of it; and that **it cannot be won unless he is willing to labor like a slave to attain it**; do you think that it will be easy for him to hearken, through so many evils?” (494d)

I will admit, though, that this passage, *by itself*, *could* simply be taken to mean that the person they are speaking of is acting unintelligently, and that he needs to make a big effort to improve himself.

There are other passages which leave much less doubt as regards what Nous is, however. I will start with the extensive Eye–Sun –Sight analogy in 507c–509a. This is, as far as I can see, the best illustration in the *Politeia* of what Nous is.

Socrates begins by asking Glaucon if he has brought to mind *the perfect care* with which the Artisan (δημιουργός, demiourgos, anglicized as “demiurge”) of the bodily senses has fashioned both the power of seeing and the power of being seen (“τὴν τοῦ ὁρᾶν τε καὶ ὁρᾶσθαι δύναμιν ἐδημιούργησεν”, 507c). The reason why he does that is that he is going to use a relationship in the world of Becoming, and one we are all familiar with, namely that which exists between our physical eyes and the sun of our solar system (Helios), to describe a similar relationship in the Realm of Higher Being. He is, in other words, going to have us “analogize”, which means “reasoning upwards” (524d), from something visible to something invisible.

This is feasible because this material world, which is the Below (584d, 586a), proceeds from that which is Truly Above (584d), and that this is his thinking is confirmed by what he then goes on to say, a few sentences later, namely that *the phenomenon of sight* in this world, which includes both the sensory ability to *see* and the ability of the objects of sight to *be seen*, is made possible by *a third genus* (507d) which *links* those two together (508a), and which is based on “no negligible idea” (a humorous play on words, 508a) – obviously an Eternal Idea in Higher Being.

What is this third genus? It is *light*, of course – the light emitted by the sun. Furthermore, Plato circumspectly has Socrates point out that *without* that light, our sensory *ability* to see would be unable to actually see anything, and the objects of sight and their colors would be invisible (507d–507e, 508b).

Thus far the argument has been easy to follow, as it has mainly dealt with the familiar, but now comes the next and crucial part of the analogy, where Socrates shifts gears, so to speak, and goes on to relate everything he has laid out to the Realm of Higher Being. The sun of Becoming is now correlated with the Offspring (“τον ἔκγονον”; ὁ ἔκγονος, ho ekgonos) or Idea of the Good, the *event* of sight (“ὄψιν”; ὄψις, opsis) with Nous, and the objects seen with the Eternal Ideas (“τα νοούμενα”, ta nououmena – another Platonic term which is also, revealingly, employed by Immanuel Kant) (508c).

He then rephrases and repeats the whole “logos” in order to make sure that Glaucon has grasped its meaning, and states that just as our physical eyes need the light of day to obtain vision, and are impotent without such light, so the Eye of the Soul is dependent upon the Higher Light radiated by the Idea of the Good for Nous, and is like an entity *without* Nous when it is turned away from Higher Being. (508c–508d)

May we then say that Nous *is* the Divine Light or Power emitted by the Idea of the Good, since there can be no vision of Higher Being without that Divine Light? There is some

slight ambiguity here, and Plato has Socrates admit that he is leaving out a whole host of things from the analogy (509c). Still, I think we *could* say that Nous is Divine Light, but that it would be more *accurate* to say that Nous is something which is *realized* when the Eye of the Soul turns towards Higher Being, and is filled with its “dazzling splendor” (518b), and beholds the Eternal Ideas.

Nous, in other words, is not something we *have* by nature, nor it is something waiting to be captured, so to speak – it is rather a mental *state*, which arises as a result of the Communion of the Eye with Higher Being. The soul *achieves* Nous during the act of Noesis, but then *loses* it when it ceases to “Noesi-thize” or Know.

There is no doctrine of Man being self-sufficient or wholly divine by nature here, only a doctrine of the possibility of contact between the human and the Divine – which exists because *the most truly human part* of Man is *akin* to the Divine. For the lover of Wisdom who achieves such contact, there is indeed the possibility of becoming like the Divine, but, as Plato repeatedly points out, *only insofar as that is possible for a human being* (500c, 613b).

### **The difficulties engendered by modern conditioning**

One of the difficulties in coming to terms with the Platonic concept of Nous probably lies in us late Moderns being so *conditioned* to think of “Intellect” as something we all *have*, and not of something which *happens* as a result of seeking and loving Wisdom, that is takes time just to get used to the suggestion that the prevailing modern anthropology could be seriously deficient in some way.

Moreover, even when we speak of such things, we almost always have something else and *lesser* in view than that which Plato is concerned with, for even the *possibility* of a

“rising” to the flawless (477e), universal and objective Knowledge signified by ἐπιστήμη and γνῶσις (477a–477b, 478a) has long since been so thoroughly denounced – particularly over the last fifty years or so – that it is rarely, if ever, regarded as absolutely real. The only significant exception to this attitude in the West is certain devoutly religious communities.

*Platonic Mysticism*, by Prof. Arthur Versluis (2017, Kindle Location 70–78) is an example of a recent work agreeing with this evaluation of mine.

## Provision and participation

In order to further clarify what the Platonic conception of Nous is, I now invite the reader to consider with me some other passages in the *Politeia*, which are almost as revelatory as the one I have just discussed. The first one I would like to highlight is this:

“(…) ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ τελευταία ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καὶ μόγις ὁρᾶσθαι, ὁφθεῖσα δὲ συλλογιστέα εἶναι ὥς ἄρα πᾶσι πάντων αὕτη ὀρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία, ἐν τε ὀρατῷ φῶς καὶ τὸν τούτου κύριον τεκοῦσα, ἐν τε νοητῷ αὕτη κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ νοῦν παρασχομένη, καὶ ὅτι δεῖ ταύτην ἰδεῖν τὸν μέλλοντα ἐμφρόνως πρᾶξιν ἢ ἰδίᾳ ἢ δημοσίᾳ.” (517b–517c)

“(…) in the Realm of Gnosis [Knowledge; the upper section of the Realm of the Noetic], the last ‘object’ to be seen, and that only with great effort, is **the Idea of the Good**, but once seen, it must be concluded that in the Realm of the Visible [Becoming], it [the Idea of the Good] is the cause of everything, and of all that is Right and Beautiful, by engendering both light and its lord [the physical sun, Helios], while in the Realm of the Noetic, it [the Idea of the Good] is *itself* the Lord [as opposed to the situation in the Realm of Becoming], **providing** Truth and **Nous** (...).” (517b–517c)

For the present analysis, the key part of that passage is the one where it is explicitly stated that Nous is *provided* by the Idea of the Good. From this we may safely deduce – as we in fact already have – that Nous is not an innate human faculty, for to provide or supply



someone with something is surely to give that someone something which was not already his or hers. It would also seem to indicate that the Idea of the Good is not *itself* Nous, for that which provides or causes something has to be greater than and prior to that which is provided or caused (at least in terms of rank).

Another passage which makes an almost identical claim is found within the analogy referred to earlier:

“τοῦτο τοίνυν τὸ τὴν ἀλήθειαν **παρέχον** τοῖς γινωσκομένοις καὶ τῷ γινώσκοντι τὴν **δύναμιν ἀποδιδόν** τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ιδέαν φάθι εἶναι: αἰτίαν δ’ ἐπιστήμης οὗσαν καὶ ἀληθείας, ὡς γινωσκομένης μὲν διανοοῦ, οὕτω δὲ καλῶν ἀμφοτέρων ὄντων, γνώσεώς τε καὶ ἀληθείας, ἄλλο καὶ κάλλιον ἔτι τούτων ἡγούμενος αὐτὸ ὀρθῶς ἡγήση: ἐπιστήμην” (508e)

“This, therefore [the Good, 508c], that **provides** the Truth to those who are Known [the Ideas, the Beings], and **dispenses the power** to that which Knows [the Eye of the Soul], you may say is **the Idea of the Good**. Thus, by being grasped by the Understanding as **the cause of Knowledge and Truth**, I would have you conceive of it as apprehended, no doubt, by Knowledge, but beautiful as is the act of Knowledge, and beautiful though Truth be – if you will be led to think that *it* [neuter; the Good in 508c; “τὰγαθόν”; Attic contr. of το ἄγαθόν (to agathon), not the Idea, which is grammatically feminine] is something else and even more beautiful than these, then you are being led to think correctly.” (Partly based on the James Adam translation.)

This is one of the more difficult passages in the *Politeia*, and the translations tend to diverge in a number of places. For our present purposes, it is – fortunately – sufficient to take heed of the great similarity between what is said here and what we have already observed. The Idea of the Good is, as in the other quote, said to be the *provider* of Truth, which is analogous to light (509a), and the *dispenser* of power – or ability – to that which Knows.

The latter part of this is merely another way to say that the Sun of Higher Being is the giver or supplier of Nous, which, as we have seen, is analogous to the *event* or *result* that

is sight (ὄψις, opsis). Neither the Idea of the Good nor the Eye of the Soul *is* Nous, just as neither the sun (ὁ ἥλιος, ho helios) nor the physical eye *is* sight. The *potential* of Nous is only “actualized”, to use a contemporary term, when the purified and reoriented inner Eye meets Divine Light. I think this is as clear as I can make it.

The final excerpt I shall adduce as evidence of these metaphysics is this:

“οὐκοῦν πληροῖτ’ ἂν ὃ τε τροφῆς **μεταλαμβάνων** καὶ ὁ νοῦν ἴσχων;

πῶς δ’ οὐ;

πλήρωσις δὲ ἀληθεστέρα τοῦ ἥττον ἢ τοῦ μᾶλλον **ὄντος**;

δῆλον ὅτι τοῦ μᾶλλον.

πότερα οὖν ἡγῇ τὰ γένη μᾶλλον **καθαρᾶς οὐσίας μετέχειν**, τὰ οἷον σίτου τε καὶ ποτοῦ καὶ ὄψου καὶ συμπάσης τροφῆς, ἢ τὸ **δόξης τε ἀληθοῦς εἶδος καὶ ἐπιστήμης καὶ νοῦ** καὶ συλλήβδην αὐτῆς πάσης ἀρετῆς (...).”

(585b–585c)

[Socrates:] Is it not the case, then, that the body that is filled partakes of nourishment, and that **the soul is filled when it holds Nous**?

[Glaucón:] How could this not be the case?

[Socrates:] Which one, then, has the more real fulfillment, that which partakes of less or that which partakes of more **Being**?

[Glaucón:] Clearly that which partakes of more.

[Glaucón:] Which of these kinds, therefore, do you think participates the more in **pure Ousia** – that which partakes of bread and drink and meat, and all such types of nourishment, or **that kind which participates in True Opinion and Knowledge and Nous**, and, in sum, of all Virtue?

(585b–585c, c.f. Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4)

The important parts of this interchange for the discussion of Nous are the terms that

signal *participation* in or *sharing* in (“μεταλαμβάνων”, from μεταλαμβάνω, “μετέχειν”; μετέχω) something, as well as the metaphor of nourishment or sustenance (“τροφή”; τροφή). If the translation is a reasonably fair representation of the original argument, we may say that the Soul – or rather, as we have seen elsewhere, *the Eye of the Soul* – partakes of nourishment when it holds (“ἴσχω”; ἴσχω) Nous, as the filling of the physical body (“σῶμα”, soma, mentioned earlier) is called a partaking of nourishment, and this, by means of the sentence construction, is made into a parallel to the Soul’s holding of Nous. Subsequently, a similar parallelism again nearly necessitates the conclusion that the Soul is said to participate in Nous.

What Socrates is leading Glaucon towards here is the realization that the pleasures of our ordinary mental state, that of Lower Becoming, are insignificant when compared to the True Pleasure (“ἀληθεὶ ἡδονή”; 585e–586b) of Higher Being, that no one who has not experienced the Above is able to view the Middle and the Below in a proper perspective (584d–585), and that true filling or satisfaction only occurs when the Soul communes with Higher Being (585d). Only when the latter state is reached, and Nous or Spiritual Vision takes place, is “psychotherapy” (“τὴν θεραπείαν τῆς ψυχῆς”; ἡ θεραπεία τῆς ψυχῆς, he therapeia tes phuches, 585d) received.

Nous is then *participated in*, in the sense that the soul partakes of that which makes it possible, but it also *happens*, in the sense that Vision can only take place when an Eye, a Light and a Giver of Light *come together*.

## The Nature of Divine Providing

Now that we have established that Nous arises as the result of a *providing*, it seems appropriate to inquire into the nature of that providing. Who or what is it that does it, and why, and how? Here we necessarily enter into a consideration which borders on the inferential and the conjectural, since Plato does not explicitly answer questions such as these in any great detail – not in the *Politeia*. Nevertheless, he does say more than enough to enable the laying out of a reasonably clear response.

First of all, the provider is, as already mentioned, the Idea of the Good, the Sun of Higher Being (508a–508c). This is said to possess an *inestimable beauty* (“ἀμήχανον κάλλος”), since it *provides* Truth (which is “light-like”) and Knowledge (which is “sight-like”), but is *superior* to both of them (509a). It is also, in one of the mentions of the challenges facing those who return to the Cave, to the gloomy Below, from the Above (517c–518b), indirectly associated with the term “λαμπροτερου μαρμαρυγης” (518b), which may perhaps be rendered in English as *dazzling* (λαμπρότης, lamprotes) *splendor* (μαρμαρυγή, marmaruge) (note the presence in the Greek of a cognate of the word lamp, as well as the origin of the word marble, μάρμαρος (marmaros)). This “marble-like brilliance” of the Truly Above is surely due to the Idea of the Good.

The same argument also correlates the Above with Divine Contemplation (“θείων θεωριῶν”; θεῖαι θεωρίαι (theiai theoriai, plural), θεῖα θεωρίᾳ (theia theoria, singular), 517d), with the Light Above (“ὁ φωτός ἄνωθεν”; ὁ φῶς ἄνωθεν, ho phos anowthen, 518b) and with True Education (518b) – and elsewhere, it is stated that the Greatest Study is the Idea of the Good (505a). It is also called Lord (or rather Lady) (“κυρία” (kyria) – the feminine form of κύριος (kyrios) – clearly a reference to “ἰδέα”, 517c) and, *indirectly*, King (“καὶ βασιλεύειν τὸ μὲν νοητοῦ γένους τε καὶ τόπου”, 509d, c.f. 587b–587d).

Incidentally, there may be an even greater study, namely that of the Father of the Idea of

the Good, but of that, Socrates for now refuses to speak – in spite of Glaucon’s admonition (“ἀλλ’, ἔφη, λέγε: εἰς αὐθις γὰρ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀποτείσεις τὴν διήγησιν.”, 506e–507a).

As we see, the conception of the Idea of the Good is an exceedingly lofty one. As far as I am able to judge, the *Politeia* leaves no room whatsoever for *reasonable* doubt as regards the identity of this Idea – not when all that is said of both it and Higher Being is seen as a whole. It is a god, and not only *a* god, but *the* God – unless the Good *itself* is regarded as separate from it – for to it Plato ascribes many of the characteristics now ascribed to the Supreme Being by the contemporary world religions. It is the *cause* (“αἰτία”, *aitia*), for example, of the sun (Helios) and the sunlight of our world (517c). All the other Beings derive their existence from *it*, and the Realm over which it presides is evidently similar to a Heaven or Paradise.

It is from this Highest Knowable God that Nous is derived. But *how* is it derived? Plato again and again speaks of the Idea of the Good as being *like* the sun, and so, it seems reasonable that we “analogize” with that as our starting-point. The Idea of the Good is the True Sun, of which the sun of Becoming is but an image, and that which is emanated by the True Sun is True, Divine Light. Now, since the sun of this world is the likeness of that other and *far greater* Sun, and the former, as we know, continually radiates light, constantly and unremittingly, and regardless of the circumstances here on Earth, we may assume that the True Sun emits its True Light in a similar fashion, only far more perfectly.

The *providing* of Truth and Nous, then, is not something which begins and ceases, and later begins again, but something which simply *is*, always and forever, eternally, regardless of whether human beings take heed of it or not (numerous statements in the *Politeia*, such as 485b, correlate Ousia and Higher Being with that which is eternal and unchangeable).

The True Sun and its Light, in other words, does not depend on human beings, or on any Being, for its existence, and when the Eye of the Soul is finally turned towards it, the Soul simply begins to see the Light that was *always* there. In a manner akin to the sun of this world, it ceaselessly *overflows* (c.f. “ἐπιρρυτον”; ἐπίρρυτος, from ἐπιρρέω, 508b), bestowing its abundance on everyone who turns towards it.

This “constancy” of the Divine providing also follows from the position of Higher Being in relation to Time, for the upper section of the Realm of the Noetic is clearly “above” or “beyond” Time, as we would put it. Plato, however, does not describe the “timelessness” of Higher Being by portraying this realm as outside of Time. Instead, he suggests that Higher Being encompasses the *whole* of Time, or *all* Time, and, conversely, that our present earthly existence is but a tiny portion or *slice* of that *entirety* of Time (or potential Time) which exists in the Above (486a–486b).

For the truly philosophic nature, as he says, is *not petty-minded*, but is capable of *magnificent* conceptions (“μεγαλοπρέπεια”, megaloprepeia), such as a Vision (“θεωρία”) of the *whole* of Time and the *whole* of Ousia (“παντὸς μὲν χρόνου, πάσης δὲ οὐσίας”, 486a–486b). In comparison with that, the time we are allotted *here*, from youth to old age, is something minute and insignificant (608c–608d).

## **The nature of Noetic Knowledge**

Now that we have determined how Plato conceives of Nous – to the degree that the *Politeia* will allow us to do so – it seems timely to probe into the nature of the Knowledge obtained thereby. What is this strange and wonderful “mental impression” which, as the above quotes plainly demonstrate, is unlike any of that which is usually categorized as “knowledge” in our modern day and age? How can a Knowledge which is not empirical and factual be of any benefit to us?

One part of the answer is that this Knowledge, once achieved, equips one with an objective standard, the proverbial yardstick, by which one may gauge the state or the value of everything that is subordinate to Higher Being – such as the fleeting phenomena and the deceptive illusions (584a) of Becoming. (C.f. 520b–520d)

If we were to express this metaphorically, we could say that so long as one has never seen the peak of a mountain one wishes to appraise, one cannot possibly know how tall it is, nor how far the parts of it one *has* seen are removed from the summit, nor what they would look like when compared to the pinnacle. It is only when the clouds covering the summit lift, and the snow-covered “abode of the gods” is illuminated by the rising sun, that one realizes just how distant the lower parts of the mountain – not to mention the habitable grasslands below it – are from that gleaming “acropolis”, tinged with purple and gold, far above.

That the Knowledge Plato has in view would have to be classified as objective, is borne out by his calling it “that which is flawless” or “that which is incapable of failure” (τῷ μὴ ἀναμαρτήτῳ, 477e). A little later, he also states, with reference to the coming comparison between ordinary education and the study of Idea of the Good, that “nothing imperfect is the measure of anything” (“ἀτελὲς γὰρ οὐδὲν οὐδενὸς μέτρον”, 504c). Hence, only the ascent to Higher Being and the Idea of the Good provides one with the perfect, unblemished Knowledge which may be used to assess everything else. In a world in constant flux, where everything is continually undergoing generation or dissolution, only the glowing memory of Divine Perfection can form a dependable standard.

Further on, he explains that a lack of Knowledge inevitably leads to unhealthy opinions (584e) in the realm of Becoming, and to confusion as regards what pleasure is (584e) – for just as people who, when they come from blackness and have never seen a pure white (λευκό), imagine the greatest possible luminosity to be that of gray (585a), so those who have never achieved Knowledge imagine things far below Higher Being to be the most

“real” things there are (584d–585a). Only one who has seen the Idea of the Good is able to act prudently (“εμφορονως”, 517c), and to establish Good Government and Justice both within and without (inferred), for only such a one as that is able to look towards a *vivid paradigm* (imparted to the mind) from the Above (during the altered or noetic state) (“ἐναργὲς ... παράδειγμα”, 484c). (ἐναργὲς is derived from ἐν (en) and ἀργός (argos) – the latter meaning bright or shining or white.)

For further illustration, the philosophic ascent to Higher Being – the gaining of Nous – is also said to be like the beholding of a Waking Vision (“ὕπαρ”, 533c). While it is difficult to know *exactly* what Plato intends to convey by that term, a Waking Vision is *not* a dream (“ὄναρ”), but rather something like the opposite. We would probably call it a *revelation* or an *epiphany* – if such terms were still in use. Moreover, the Waking Vision is contrasted with and said to be superior to the ordinary interaction with Lower Being that is carried out by means of Dianoia – for this latter activity is likened to “dreaming of Being” (“ὥς ὀνειρώττουσι μὲν περὶ τὸ ὄν”, 533b–533c).

Finally, one could say that Platonic Knowledge is a Saving Knowledge, for the philosophers who achieve it journey to the proverbial Islands of the Blessed (540a–540b) after death – probably another term for the Spiritual Heaven (615a) – where they are crowned as victors (613b–613c) and receive rewards of an inconceivably great magnitude (608c, 614a). The philosopher who perseveres till the End is, in other words, saved from the decent into Hades, and certainly from everlasting confinement in Tartarus.

Hence, the final words of Socrates in the *Politeia*: “And thus, Glaucon, a tale [of Eros] was saved, and not lost, and it could save us, if we were persuaded by it (...).” (620d)



# Chapter III

## A preface to the analysis of *Nous* in St. Augustine

### Making the transition from Athens to Hippo

I now invite the reader to accompany me on what I believe will be a most interesting continuation of the journey we have begun. However, to facilitate the transition from Plato to St. Augustine, and to make the reader aware of certain issues I think are important to keep in mind as we delve into the actual texts, I have decided to preface this inquiry with (1) a brief consideration of what it was St. Augustine endeavored to accomplish, (2) what I view as some of the overriding patterns in the works in question and (3) a revision of the definitions of important terms given earlier.

Having studied his aforementioned literary creations, and having also acquired some degree of understanding of the general situation the Classical, Greco-Roman world of the Mediterranean was in during his lifetime, as well of as of the immensely rich and variegated heritage bequeathed to it by preceding centuries, I would assert, with some confidence, that his “grand project” – at least that of his 40s – was to effect an *intellectually satisfying fusion* of the multitude of often odd and enigmatic statements and narratives in Holy Writ with the sophisticated metaphysics and the exceptionally lofty theology of Platonic philosophy.

To what *degree* he was *conscious* of this objective of his when composing the works I am here treating of is difficult to say with certainty, for he never explicitly states that his goal is the creation of a *synthesis* of Holy Scripture and Platonism, and for him to have done so would probably have been unwise. In any case, the texts themselves are sufficient

testimony to the nature of the outcome, which is the amalgamation of “Athens” with “Jerusalem”, as well as to the colossal effort that went into effecting it – as we shall see later on.

## Overriding patterns

This observation brings me to the next series of points I would like to make, namely that of certain overriding patterns.

In the first place, Platonic categories, or, to be more precise, categories exceedingly reminiscent of the ones that first appear in literary history (in a more than fragmentary form) with Plato’s dialogues, *permeate* almost every part of both *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*. These highly distinctive philosophical and metaphysical categories were not, of course, suddenly seen or invented by Plato, but owed their rise, at least partially, to even earlier developments, in both Hellas and elsewhere, as Plato himself indicates (in *Politeia* 530d and *Timaeus* 21d–22c, for example), such as the philosophical movement initiated by Pythagoras, and the religious thought of ancient Egypt (Proclus, 2010, Ch. V, p. 54; Iamblichus, 2016, Ch. II–IV, Kindle Location 244–289), but for the present purpose, it is sufficiently precise to call them Platonic.

One interesting aspect of this feature of the above mentioned works by St. Augustine is, however, that it is only immediately apparent to the reader who is already thoroughly familiar with Platonic theology and metaphysics. To anyone who is not, it is largely invisible, and could, for the most part, be easily overlooked, and even if the neophyte should notice something “unusual”, any observed “anomalies” could effortlessly be dismissed as extrapolations from Scripture.

This is due to the elegance with which St. Augustine weaves sentences and passages from

Scripture together with the Platonic metaphysical schema – and also to his practice of rarely crediting Platonism explicitly, while at the same time liberally mentioning the supposed authors of various scriptural treatises.

My intention in pointing this out is not at all to detract from or “de-legitimize” St. Augustine’s achievements – on the contrary, I view the presence of Platonism in his works as a great strength, and as an impressive witness to the magnanimity of his mind – my intention is rather to bring out the fact that he stood on the shoulders of giants, as the saying goes, and to begin laying the groundwork for certain conclusions I shall be drawing further on.

In the second place, there are two principal cornerstones at the foundation of St. Augustine’s grand project, which are referenced in one way or another in almost every book in both *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*, namely Holy Writ and Platonic metaphysics. However, as I have already pointed out, unless one is intimately acquainted with the latter, one will usually only notice the former. Several translators appear to belong to this class, as they tend to highlight every quote from and allusion to the Christian Bible with a footnote or the like – something St. Augustine himself never did – but usually neglect to emphasize obvious or probable references to Platonic philosophy.

The first of these two cornerstones could also be called Christ the God-Man, the Incarnation of the Word, for as I read *Confessions*, it is the moving story of what Christ did in Time, and the desire to believe in that story as true, which forms the *basic motivation* for St. Augustine’s efforts, for if Christ had not come into the world, or if the story of His sojourn here on Earth had not existed, there would have been no compelling reason for St. Augustine to deviate from the traditional Platonism which he embraced in his 30s (Conf. VII.9.13–15, VII.10.16, VII.17.23).

This circumstance is borne out by Book VII in *Confessions*, where he admits that he

found almost the entire *otherworldly* part of what is usually denominated *Christian* theology, such as the concept of the Eternal Word, set forth and elucidated upon in “certain books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin”, coming from “the Athenians”, and he even claims that those books were procured for him – indirectly, of course – by the Lord Himself (*dominus*, VII.8.12). What he did not find in that Platonic literature, he says, was the story of the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection (VII.9.13–14).

When speaking of a somewhat earlier period in his life, moreover, when he was afflicted with doubt, he states that “I refused to commit the cure of my fainting soul to the philosophers [here meaning the ancient Skeptics], because they were without the saving name of Christ.” (Conf. V.14.25)

Hence, it is fairly clear that it was the desire to retain the moving story of what Christ did in the world – to *save the Savior* as a credible idea in the Mind of Man, so to speak – which eventually led St. Augustine to do what he did. Furthermore, it was Christ the Word, the *Wisdom of God* (Conf. XI.9.11, D.Tr. II.17.31), which enabled him to bridge the gap between Christianity and Platonism, as I will show later on. Accordingly, the Mediator (Conf. VII.18.24) between God and Man also became, in St. Augustine’s revised schema, the mediator between “Athens” and “Jerusalem”.

The second of the cornerstones, True Philosophy, as Plato calls it, was also an indispensable part of the brilliant spiritual edifice St. Augustine labored so hard to erect. For the *Confessions* make it abundantly clear, when read carefully, that St. Augustine would *probably* not have become the *devout* Christian *apologist* he ultimately became unless he had encountered philosophy – first, at the tender age of 19, in Marcus Tullius Cicero’s *Hortensius* (III.4.7–8), and then, circa ten years later, in the “books of the Platonists” I have already mentioned.

One reason for this is that it was philosophy (along with the *allegorical method* of interpreting the Old Testament, recommended to him by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, V.13.23–V.14.24) which gradually enabled him to overcome the constricted, carnal way of thinking we would call *materialism* – a problem he *again and again* returns to when describing his youth and his 20s (III.7.12, IV.2.3, IV.6.11, IV.15.26, V.10.19, V.10.20, V.11.21, VI.3.4, VII.1.1, VII.20.26).

It was also philosophy which equipped him with the means by which he could conceive of Evil as Unreality or Non-Being (III.7.12, V.10.20, VII.7.11, VII.11.17, VII.12.18, VII.16.22), and thereby escape the Manichean conception of Evil as a sort of Anti-God, having an independent existence (VIII.10.24, IX.4.10).

Finally, I think St. Augustine realized that the Christian Bible nowhere provides the reader with anything like a complex, coherent and comprehensible *metaphysical system* (which, incidentally, is probably why the writings of that mysterious “Dionysus” – now often called *Pseudo-Dionysius* – received such a warm welcome some generations later), that an *intellectually satisfying* and *defensible* Christian religion requires “wisdom-loving” interpretation and development, and that the beauty and attractiveness of Platonic theology was so great that it simply could not be completely discarded and abandoned by anyone with a sense of Justice.

That the latter assertion was in fact his view is perhaps most palpably indicated by his extensive use of Divine Names which are significantly more easily derived from Platonism than from the Bible, such as *Beauty* and *the Good* (the adjective turned into a noun). For now, consider the following examples from *Confessions*:

“(…) O Beauty beyond compare, O Creator of all, O thou good God – God the highest good and my true good.” (II.6.12)

“Thou art beautiful; thus they [created things] are beautiful. Thou art good, thus

they are good. Thou art; thus they are. But they are not as beautiful, nor as good, nor as truly real as thou their Creator art.” (XI.4.6)

“But thou, O the one good God (...) thou art the Good, and needest no rest, and art always at rest, because thou thyself art thy own rest.” (XIII.38.53)

These cornerstones, rejected by some builders, but embraced by St. Augustine, could be said to correspond to the two epistemological *directions* we often denote Empiricism and Rationalism, but which could here be more illuminatingly styled Understanding by way of an external medium and Knowledge by way of the establishing of a mental connection to That Which Is Truly Above. With *De Trinitate* he does, however, subordinate Knowing in this life to Trusting, to Faith (IV.15.20, IV.18.24) – Trusting in the “empirical” record that is Holy Writ. This raises some fascinating questions, since he himself was greatly aided on his journey towards an unwavering Christian Trust by his Platonic mystical experiences of Divine Light – a Light he himself equates with the Christian God:

“And being admonished by these books [the aforementioned books of the Platonists] to return into myself, I entered into my inward soul, guided by thee [the Lord]. This I could do because thou wast my helper. **And I entered, and with the eye of my soul** – such as it was – **saw above the same eye of my soul and above my mind the Immutable Light.** (...) **He who knows the Truth knows that Light**, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it, O Eternal Truth and True Love and Beloved Eternity! **Thou art my God**, to whom I sigh both night and day. When I first knew thee, thou didst lift me up, that I might see that there was something to be seen, though I was not yet fit to see it. And thou didst beat back the weakness of my sight, shining forth upon me **thy dazzling beams of light**, and I trembled with love and fear. (...)” (Conf. VII.10.16)

Note the use of the past tense in his description of the ascent itself, and the use of the *present* tense in his ardent affirmation that *the Immutable Light is God* (or belongs to God). The latter is not something he believed in bygone years, it is his conviction *right now*, as he is penning (or dictating) these words of eloquence.

## The definitions reconsidered

Before we proceed, we also need to reexamine the definitions we considered earlier, as the present verbal and mental confusion makes linguistic precision absolutely vital to the success of this inquiry. These adjusted definitions will then be applied to the analysis of St. Augustine.

Is it unfair to employ these fundamentally Platonic or Pythagorean definitions when discussing the works of a *Christian* theologian? I would say that it is not. As already pointed out, St. Augustine himself constantly makes use of categories identical to or highly reminiscent of the Platonic ones. Moreover, it is in any case quite necessary, as the nature of the comparison, beginning with Plato and ending with St. Augustine, almost necessitates it, and as St. Augustine's works do not, for the most part, allow the reader to extract from them terms as precisely defined as Plato's works will usually allow him to distill. One reason why that is so is that St. Augustine manifestly did not view it as necessary to define or defend terms having their origin in or being replicated by Scripture, as the mere fact of their existing somewhere in Scripture guaranteed their validity.

If the purpose of pinning down the nature of *Nous* is to be accomplished, however, we need to have a clearly discernable *yardstick* of some kind, so that we will be able to make various *measurements*, as it were, and in the *imperfect* realm of human languages, there is none more faultless than the Platonic one.

**Being.** In St. Augustine, the foremost corresponding term is **Eternity** (aeternitas, D.Tr. IV.18.24). That fits very well with the Platonic conception of Being, for, as we have seen, the adjective Eternal is plainly associated with Higher Being, which, again, is also the realm of Time as a Whole (486a–486b), the unfathomable “Simultaneity” we, while on

Earth, experience a tiny fraction of in the form of what we call *past*, *present* and *future* – an experience which is due to our existing *within* the dimension of Chronological Time.

But St. Augustine also, *effectively*, employs the designations That Which Alone Is or That Which Truly Is (e.g. “sola uere est”, “quae uerius est”, “quo uere est”) (D.Tr. VIII.1.2), which are strikingly similar to the Platonic designations I have discussed earlier.

Additionally, he correlates Eternity with a number of other important, and, to us, already familiar concepts, such as Life Eternal (uita aeterna), Truth (ueritas), Sight (species), Contemplation (contemplatio) (D.Tr. IV.18.24) and Essence (D.Tr. II.18.35).

Concerning **Essence**, this is used as synonymous with **Nature** (in the sense of Invisible, True Nature) and **Substance** (D.Tr. II.18.35). Still, St. Augustine indicates that he *prefers* the term Essence over that of Substance (D.Tr. III.11.21, D.Tr. V.2.3).

Why this preference? If we consider the etymology of the Latin **essentia**, we find that it has virtually the same origin as the Greek οὐσία, namely the verb we know as “to be” – or “**I am**”.

He even links Eternity and Truth with the adjectives intelligible and unchangeable (“**intelligibile** atque **incommutabile**”, D.Tr. VIII.1.2), the former of which is the equivalent in St. Augustine of Noetic, and the latter of which is plainly just an alternative way of referring to Being, as “mutable” (mutabilis, D.Tr. IV.18.24, usually translated as “changeable”) in St. Augustine corresponds to Becoming or Generation in Plato, while *Immutable*, the negation of mutable, and usually rendered as unchangeable, signifies that which is *above* or *beyond* the mutable, namely Being.

The *relationship* between Being and Becoming is also exceedingly similar to the Platonic one. Created things are created by the **Truth Itself** (ueritas ipsa, D.Tr. VIII.1.2), while in



Plato, Higher Being, the Realm of Truth, is the plane of the Eternal Ideas, which continually give rise to the manifestations of Becoming.

In sum, I see no great difference between the fundamental character of Platonic Being and that of the “Augustinian” Eternity. There are, however, as the observant reader may already have noticed, certain dissimilarities concerning what one might call the *content* and the *partitioning* of Being – these I intend to return to later.

**Becoming.** The equivalents of this Platonic term in St. Augustine are **the Temporal** (temporale), and **That Which Has A Beginning** (as in “Quantum enim ad id **quod ortum** est aeternitas ualet ...”). The things of Becoming are called *temporal things* (utilia temporalia), or *things which have a beginning* (res ortis), or *things done in time* (as in “Nunc ergo adhibemus fidem **rebus temporaliter** gestis propter nos ...”). We also sometimes find terms such as the changeable or the mutable (mutabilis) and mortal (mortalis). (D.Tr. IV.18.24) Further variations on the theme are “quae facta sunt” and “res mutabilis” (D.Tr. IV.16.21).

The Latin term “ortus” makes the identification of **Becoming** with the **Temporal** well nigh incontrovertible, I would contend, since Becoming, as we have seen, is actually the Greek term **γένεσις**, Genesis, and since γένεσις has, according to the dictionaries, several of the same branches of meaning as “ortus”, e.g. beginning, birth, generation, origin, etc. Unsurprisingly, therefore, St. Augustine does indeed, when speaking of the sojourn of Christ on Earth, use “ortus” in the sense of “born” (“ortus, mortuus, resuscitatus, assumptus”) – in the very same chapter as the one where he links the Temporal with “quod ortum [habet]”. (D.Tr. IV.18.24)

Once again, there are no great differences between the Platonic and the Augustinian conception. St. Augustine even hints – or *more* than hints – at the Platonic distinction between Higher and Lower Becoming, for in *De Trinitate*, in passages eerily evocative of

certain parts of Plato's *Politeia*, he repeatedly mentions the problem of phantasms distracting the Mind from the pursuit of God. Consider VII.6.11, VIII.2.3 and X.7.10, as well as the particularly instructive example below:

“And as, when we speak of bodies (corpora) by means of the bodily sense, there arises in our mind [or *in our soul*, in animo nostro] some **likeness** (similitudo) of them, which is **a phantasm** (phantasia) of the memory; **for the bodies themselves** (ipsa corpora) **are not at all in the mind** (in animo), when we think them, but only **the likenesses** (similitudines) of those bodies (...).” (IX.11.16)

St. Augustine effectively agrees with Plato that one of the fundamental problems afflicting Man is the *hegemony* of εἰκασία (eikasia), which is usually translated as Image-Thinking, but which is perhaps better translated as Remote-Likeness-Thinking or Shadow-Thinking.

This spiritual quagmire is at the root of many of our problems, they would say (Plato, in 533d, calls it a “bog”, and St. Augustine, in Conf. VII.5.2, styles it a “pit”), as it inevitably leads to what we tend to call Subjectivism (due to the lack of an indubitable Objective Standard) and Sin (the equivalent of which in Plato is clearly the indulging of the unnecessary and harmful desires we are all born with – *Politeia* 558d–558e, 571b, 572b – as well as the *excessive* indulging of the necessary desires – 559c–559d), and also to what Christians have sometimes called spiritual fornication (the worship of the things of Becoming instead of the Lord of Being).

**Soul.** In this case, the counterpart in the English translations of St. Augustine is identical to the established translation of Plato's ψυχή (psyche) – i.e. soul. St. Augustine's Latin texts employ a different term, however, i.e. **anima**. Actually, there are three intimately related terms and concepts having to do with what *we* call the Soul in *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*, namely **anima**, **animus** and **mens**. Let us deal with each in turn.

The first term, *anima*, is the one usually translated as soul in *Confessions* (as in the Outler

translation), and frequently, but not always, in *De Trinitate* (as in the Haddan translation). This is the term corresponding the most closely to the Greek term ψυχή, as both are grammatically feminine, and both have the same range of meaning, exemplified by breath, life, soul and wind. St. Augustine, however, *always* uses *anima* in the sense of what European culture, broadly speaking, has traditionally meant by the Individual Soul, namely an invisible, spiritual *entity*, carrying personal consciousness, and capable of surviving bodily death.

*Anima* is, as anyone can see, a close kin of the second term, *animus*, which can have the same meanings as *anima*, but which can also signify something like *Mind*, in a general sense, or even bold spirit or courage.

As in the case of *anima*, the origin of *animus* is, probably, the Greek term ἄνεμος, the primary meaning of which is wind. It occurs fairly frequently in *De Trinitate*, but I have been unable to establish the *precise reason* – if such a one exists – why St. Augustine sometimes uses this masculine term, and, at other times, the feminine *anima*.

The translator of my edition of *De Trinitate*, Rev. Arthur West Haddan, tends to render *animus* as mind, and *anima* as soul, and I see no grounds for disapproving of that choice, since it at least allows the reader of the English to distinguish between the two.

Incidentally, these Classical, Latin terms must not be confused with the identically named *archetypes* in the psychology of C. G. Jung – albeit some hint of the difference between the two could, perhaps, be gleaned from Jung's adoption of them. (C.f. Jung, 2014, Chapter III)

The third term, *mens*, is also a frequent one in *De Trinitate*. As far as I can see, St. Augustine does usually apply *anima* and *mens* in a consistent, rational manner, so that the former may be translated as Soul and the latter as Mind, for they sometimes occur within

the same chapter and the same logos or line of reasoning. Still, as the reader has hopefully noticed, we have something of a problem, since we have *two* Latin terms which are being translated with the *same* English word – *animus* and *mens* – and since St. Augustine’s rationale for alternating between them is *not*, as far as I am able to judge, clearly spelled out by the circumstances. It even happens that *anima* is used more or less interchangeably with *mens* (D.Tr. X.4.6 –X.7.9)

Occasionally, moreover, he introduces a *fourth* Latin term, *spiritus*, to denote the Individual Soul, when he could equally well, it seems, have used *anima* (D.Tr. IV.13.16, D.Tr. IV.20.28).

This is further complicated by St. Augustine’s concept of Christ the Word as the Life of the Soul. As the Individual Soul is the Life of the body, and *superior* to it, so Christ the Word is the Life of the Individual Soul, and superior to *it*. (Conf. III.6.10)

As I intend to show in further detail further on, the idea of the Individual Soul constitutes one of the few metaphysical concepts where there is a disagreement between Plato and St. Augustine. It is not *very* great, but it is significant.

**Intellect.** The problem of linguistic ambiguity continues to accompany us as we move on to another central term, Intellect, and its various forms. For the Latin nouns *intellectus* and *intellegentia* are often used by St. Augustine to denote Understanding, which we have defined as *Dianoia*, while the Latin verb, *intellego*, “I intellect”, is frequently employed to signify the *act* of Understanding, of Reasoning. This is actually quite in keeping with the etymology of the Latin, which shows us that the origin of the verb is the notion of “a choosing between” alternatives (Valpy, 1828, p. 207), and *not* one of mental seeing or knowing.

Nevertheless, below are some examples to corroborate this assertion, which not a few readers will probably view with some skepticism, as the Latin *intellectus* is frequently correlated with the Greek Nous (partly because νοῦς and νόος are often translated into *English* as intellect):

1. “(...) et quam recte pater et filius et spiritus sanctus unius eiusdemque substantiae uel essentiae dicatur, credatur, **intellegatur** (...).” (D.Tr. I.2.4)

Translation: “(...) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are rightly said, believed, **understood**, to be of one and the same substance or essence (...).”

2. “Non incongruenter ex persona domini nostri Iesu Christi praefiguratum **solet intellego** (...).” (D.Tr. II.17.28)

Translation: “Not unfitly is it **commonly understood** to be prefigured from the person of our Lord Jesus Christ (...).”

3. “Hanc enim opinionem illi pepererunt qui non potuerunt in unitate trinitatis **intellegere quod dictum est**: Regi autem saeculorum immortalis, inuisibili soli deo (...).” (D.Tr. II.17.32)

Translation: “For they gave birth to this opinion who were not able to **understand** in respect to the unity of the Trinity **such texts as**, ‘Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God’ [1 Tim 1:17] (...).”

4. “**Ita enim canitur**: Hierusalem quae aedificatur ut ciuitas, cuius participatio eius in idipsum. Idipsum quippe hoc loco illud summum et incommutabile bonum **intellegitur** quod deus est atque sapientia uoluntasque ipsius (...).” (D.Tr. III.2.8)

Translation: “**For so it is sung**, ‘Jerusalem is builded as a city, that is partaker of that which is in and of itself.’ [Psalm 122:3] For ‘in and of itself,’ in that place, is **understood** of that chiefest and unchangeable good, which is God, and of His own wisdom and will.”

5. “Secundum hoc iam potest **intellegi** non tantum ideo dici missus filius quia uerbum caro factum est, sed ideo missus ut uerbum caro fieret et per praesentiam corporalem illa quae scripta sunt operaretur, id est ut non tantum homo missus **intellegatur** quod uerbum factum est, sed et uerbum missum ut homo fieret (...).” (D.Tr. IV.20.27)

Translation: “And according to this manner [the preceding rational argument] we

can now **understand** that the Son is not only said to have been sent because ‘the Word was made flesh,’ [John 1:3] but therefore sent that the Word might be made flesh (...); that is, that not only is He **understood** to have been sent as man, which the Word was made but the Word, too, was sent that it might be made man (...).”

6. “Sed utrum tantummodo corporalem atque sensibilem, an adhibito **spiritu** etiam **rationali uel intellectuali** (hoc enim quibusdam placuit appellare quod graeci dicunt **noeron**).” (D.Tr. IV.21.31)

Translation: “(...) but whether only corporeal and sensible, or whether by the employment also of the **spirit** [here used as synonymous with anima] **rational or intellectual** (for this is the term by which some choose to call what the Greeks name **νοερόν**) (...).”

7. “Et quemadmodum cum **memoriam meam et intellectum et uoluntatem** nomino, singula quidem nomina ad res singulas referuntur sed tamen ab omnibus tribus singula facta sunt; nullum enim horum trium nominum est quod non et **memoria et intellectus et uoluntas mea** simul operata sint (...)” (D.Tr. VI.21.30)

Translation: “And as, when I name **my memory, and intellect, and will**, each name refers to each severally, but yet each is uttered by all three; for there is no one of these three names that is not uttered by both **my memory and my intellect and my will** together (...).”

8. “For perhaps what I wish to say may be more easily perceived in this way. For when, for instance, a mind is called good (animus bonus), as there are two words, so **from these words I understand** (intellego) two things – one whereby it is mind (animus), and another whereby it is good (bonus).” (D.Tr. VIII.3.4)

9. “**Mentem** quippe **ipsam in memoria et intellegentia et uoluntate** suimetipsius talem reperiēbamus ut quoniam semper se **nosse** semperque se ipsam uelle **comprehendebatur**, simul etiam semper sui meminisse semperque se ipsam **intellegere et amare** comprehenderetur, quamuis non semper se cogitare discretam ab eis quae non sunt quod ipsa est.” (D.Tr. X.12.19)

Translation: “Since we found **the mind itself** to be such in **its own memory, and understanding, and will**, that since it was **understood** always **to know** and always to will itself, it was understood also at the same time always to remember itself, always **to understand and love** itself (...).”

10. “Sic interim **sentio** propter illud **caelum caeli, caelum intellectuale, ubi est intellectus nosse simul**, non ex parte, non in aenigmate, non per speculum, sed ex

toto, in manifestatione, facie ad faciem; non modo hoc, modo illud, sed quod dictum est **nosse simul sine ulla vicissitudine temporum (...).**” (Conf. XII.13.16)

Translation: “Thus, for the time being **I understand** that ‘**heaven of heavens**’ to mean **the intelligible heaven, where to understand is to know all at once** – not ‘in part,’ not ‘darkly,’ not ‘through a glass’ – but as a simultaneous whole, in full sight, ‘face to face.’ [1 Cor 13:12] It is not this thing now and then another thing, but (as we said) **knowledge all at once without any temporal change.**”

If we first examine examples 1–5, we see that the act spoken of by way of the Latin verb *intellego* is plainly best translated into English as an act of understanding or reasoning, and not as the state or event we have defined as Noesis, as St. Augustine refers to either the interpretation of Scripture (3 and 4) or the comprehension of a rational argument (1, 2 and 5) or a reasoning based on verbal analysis (8). This is particularly evident in 2, where he mentions a *widespread* kind of Understanding, whereas Noesis is, as we have seen, something very rare (at least in *this* life), and exceedingly difficult to attain to.

Moving on, we then find, in example 6, something very odd, considering what we have been discussing, for here St. Augustine appears to be treating the adjectives rational and intellectual as *synonyms* – a feature of the Individual Soul or Spirit – and he then goes on to claim that these are the terms by which some translate the Greek adjective “νοερός” (νοερός, noeros) into Latin. But *who* are those translators, and *which* are the translations he has in mind? He does not say.

Turning to example 7 and 9, which are excerpts from passages where he elucidates his psychology, and makes comparisons between the human Mind or Soul and the Trinity, we find that St. Augustine views *intellectus* or *intelligentia* as an integral and innate part of that Mind or Soul – a *faculty*, as we would call it. But if *that* is the case, which it clearly is, then *St. Augustine’s intellectus* cannot be the equivalent of Plato’s Nous, which is *provided* by the Idea of the Good, and is *not* innate, nor can his *intellectus* be called the same as Plato’s Noesis, which is an *event*, a state, dependent upon Divine Light.

The final “clincher”, I would say, is example 10, which is taken from *Confessions*. Here we see that St. Augustine is indeed able to distinguish between Understanding and Knowing, for in this matchless fusion of Plato and St. Paul, the Biblical Genesis and the Divided Line, St. Augustine states that in the Afterlife, in the Heaven of Heavens (an idea suggestive of the ὑπερουράνιος (hyperouranios) in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, 247c), Understanding will be replaced by *Knowing* – one almost indistinguishable from the Noesis we have learned of by way of the *Republic/Politeia*.

We also see that St. Augustine employs the verb **nosse** (see also D.Tr. X.12.19), a poetic derivative of **gnosco** – and now that this has been uncovered, I think the kinship between St. Augustine’s Latin term and the Hellenic γινώσκω (pointed out by the Lewis & Short dictionary), with its obvious link to γνῶσις (gnosis), Plato’s Objective Knowledge, should be apparent.

As for *intellectus*, I would grant that there are places in St. Augustine’s works where intellection appears to take on a role *approaching* that of Noesis. One such place is D.Tr. V.1.2. But even there, he states that intellectus is something we *have*, something belonging to *us*. At any rate, those instances are fairly rare, and I think we would do well to look for other concepts in our search for Nous in St. Augustine.

Finally, there is yet another curious phenomenon to take notice of, which is that the adjectives *intellectualis* and *intellegibilis* are often used by St. Augustine to refer to a realm which appears to be identical to the one Plato refers to by way of the adjective *Noetic* – the plane or dimension we have called Higher Being (if this is not already obvious, I am confident that it will have become so by the time this inquest reaches its end).

In any case, this use of the adjectives is exemplified by the following magnificent passage (call to mind how Being was defined):



“Nihil enim fit uisibiliter et sensibiliter quod non **de interiore inuisibili atque intellegibili aula summi imperatoris** aut iubeatur aut permittatur secundum **ineffabilem iustitiam** praemiorum atque poenarum, gratiarum et retributionum, **in ista totius creaturae amplissima quadam immensaque republica.**” (D.Tr. III.4.9)

Translation: “For nothing is done visibly or sensibly, unless either by command or permission from **the interior palace, invisible and intelligible, of the supreme Governor**, according to **the unspeakable justice** of rewards and punishments, of favor and retribution, **in that far-reaching and boundless commonwealth of the whole creature** [meaning the Whole Creation, Spiritual *and* Corporal].”

I have spent a considerable amount of time and space on this one issue, but I think it was quite unavoidable, since this Gordian knot of confusion had to be unraveled with a carefully sharpened blade of *logos* before we could proceed.

**Nous.** The way has now been paved for correlating the Platonic terms most crucial to this inquest with their *actual* Augustinian equivalents. In the case of Nous, I would say that this is **the Immutable Light** (*lux incommutabilis*, Conf. VII.10.16), which is also called “that so transcendent light (in tam excellenti luce)” (D.Tr. I.2.4) and “that first twinkling with which thou art dazzled, as it were, by a flash” (D.Tr. VIII.2.3). (The term transcendent is the one chosen by the translator – the Immutable Light transcends the Mind in the sense that it is “above” or “beyond” it, and far more excellent.) But I think we could go further, and draw a convincing parallel between Nous and the Holy Spirit. I will elaborate on that further on.

**Noesis.** As far as I can see, the most frequently used Augustinian term which may be said to serve the same role as Noesis in Plato is **Contemplation**, *contemplatio* (for examples, see D.Tr. I.8.17, D.Tr. II.17.28, D.Tr. IV.18.24, D.Tr. IV.19.26).

Like Noesis, it involves the confluence of three distinct genera, which we have already

gained some *Understanding* of, namely (1) the Eye of the Soul (*Confessions*) or the Eye of the Mind (*De Trinitate*), (2) the Eternal Ideas, or, when the Eternal Word is the object seen, the Idea or Appearance of God and (3) the Immutable Light which enables the Eye to See. For St. Augustine *does indeed* speak of the Eternal Ideas, in a manner quite consonant with the Platonic metaphysical schema, but his doing so is, to some extent, obscured by the English translations of the Latin, and even by the Latin itself, for St. Augustine never employs the term Idea, nor do the English translations I am using.

Instead, St. Augustine calls the Eternal Ideas *Forms* (*formae*) – a term I have deliberately been avoiding due to its inherent ambiguity, and to the modern confusion enveloping it. The place most clearly evidencing this – that the Augustinian Forms are largely identical to Plato’s Ideas – is perhaps the elaborate consideration of Justice some way into *De Trinitate* (D.Tr. VIII.9.13).

When speaking of the *beholding* of God Himself, however – an event we *could* call the encounter with the *Idea* of God, since the Greek term idea (ἰδέα) is derived from the verb εἶδω, “I see” (Latin cognate *video*) – St. Augustine employs a different term, which in the English translation is rendered as Appearance, but which in actuality is the Latin **species** (D.Tr. II.17.28). What is intriguing about this is that *species* has almost exactly the same range of meaning as idea, such as kind, beautiful appearance and *countenance* (see LSJ; Lewis & Short; Beekes, 2010, pp. 379–380, 577). Furthermore, the *origin* of *species* (no pun intended) is the verb *specio*, which has the same meaning as εἶδω.

According to St. Augustine, it is the Species or Idea of God, which is the “Face” (*facies*) of God, which is the Manifestation Itself (*ipsa manifestatio*) of the Wisdom of God, which is Christ the Word, the *Eternal* Word, which every one “who strives to love God” and “every rational soul” (*omnis anima rationalis*) sighs for and desires. (D.Tr. II.17.31, D.Tr. II.17.28).

I do not think I need to point out to the reader *which* Idea in the Platonic metaphysical schema this *Species* most closely resembles. The similarity between the two concepts is astounding.

**Knowledge.** The foremost equivalent of Plato's ἐπιστήμη in the works of St. Augustine is actually the Latin term **sapientia**, which is usually translated into English as **wisdom**. This may come as a surprise, but certain statements in *De Trinitate* (XIV.19.26, XV.3.5, XV.10.17) leave no room for doubt as regards the validity of this correlation. For St. Augustine states that it is Contemplative Wisdom (contemplatiua sapientia) that is “properly” called Wisdom, and that this Wisdom derived from Contemplation is distinct from ordinary knowledge (in the Platonic schema Opinion), which *he* calls science (scientia). (D.Tr. XIV.19.26)

This Wisdom must not, of course, be confused with the totality of the Eternal Wisdom *itself*, which, in St. Augustine's schema, is Christ the Word, but it *is* the result of contemplating that Eternal Wisdom.

As St. Augustine puts it, this *received* Wisdom (my expression) is something a human being *only* has because it is *from* Him, i.e. the Eternal Word, by way of *participation* (participatio), and that it is *only* such contemplative participation in Wisdom that makes “a rational or intellectual mind” (mens rationalis et intellectualis) *truly Wise* (“uere sapiens”). (D.Tr. XIV.19.26)

This is instructive by itself, but further on, he also adds that the True Wisdom of Man is “that which is granted him by God's gift in the partaking of that very God Himself.” (D.Tr. XV.3.5) But *what* is the Gift of God? That, in the Augustinian schema, is the Holy Spirit (D.Tr. V.11.12, D.Tr. V.16.17)

St. Augustine's received Wisdom has, in other words, a number of the same

characteristics as Plato's Objective Knowledge, which is ἐπιστήμη, for *both* are the *result* of a *participation in* or *partaking of* Eternity or Higher Being, and *both* come about when the Eye of the Soul or the Eye of the Mind is filled with Divine Light (in Plato, as we have seen, *potential* Nous) and experiences *Contemplation* or *Noesis*, i.e. Light or Nous being *received* (remember that Nous is *provided* by or *given* by the Idea of the Good), which is *Sight*. As St. Augustine's words clearly show, the "rational or intellectual mind" (or Soul) does not, if left to its own devices, have Wisdom, and the same is, as we have seen, true of Nous – for without it, there can be no ἐπιστήμη.

As a means for further clarifying what Wisdom or Sapiientia *received* is, we should take note of the fact that the Latin *sapientia* is, in all likelihood, either a cognate of or a derivative of the Greek σαφήνεια (from σάφα – Beekes, 2010, p. 1314), which, in Plato's *Politeia* (478c, 509e, 518b), is one of the properties of Higher Being, or the upper section of the Realm of the Noetic (and, by implication, of ἐπιστήμη), and which could be translated as splendid or luminous *clarity*. (Hence, Sapiientia is *water-like* and *sap-like*, and thus evocative of the concept of *Living Water* in John 4:10 and 7:38, for example.)

# Chapter IV

## The Eye of the Soul and Nous in St. Augustine

### The research question rephrased

Now that some of the definitions have been amended, we are at last ready to advance on the territory still eluding capture. The research problem could presently be rephrased yet again, to reflect the Augustinian alternations we have been preparing to inquire into:

**“What is the Eye of the Soul, what is the Holy Spirit, what is Contemplation, and what is the role of Faith?”**

I intend to deal with each in turn, and so, I shall begin with the Organ of Vision, but as in the previous inquest, we need to first of all examine the nature of the entity to which the Organ belongs, so that we may be well prepared to grasp what that Organ itself is.

### The Nature of the Individual Soul in the works of St. Augustine

The Augustinian conception of that entity, the Individual Soul, is in a number of ways exceedingly similar to the Platonic one. St. Augustine *does*, however, introduce certain changes which, depending on how these are interpreted, could be seen as either insignificant or rather significant. Of these, the most striking and perplexing one is his assigning to the Soul a sort of *intermediate* position, meaning one *between* the Unchangeable and the Changeable, the Eternal and the Temporal, Being and Becoming. Let us take a closer look at what it is that he does.

Like Plato, he views the Soul as *burdened* by and *limited* by its associating with the physical body. So it is not at all true that St. Augustine repudiated this aspect of Platonism, which the modern materialist, who is so invested in Becoming, finds it so difficult to stomach. On the contrary, I would say that St. Augustine actually emphasizes the *oppressive* character of physical embodiment *more* than Plato does, and, in this respect at least, could be seen as moving towards an *extreme* – and one which does not fit very well with the Platonic concept of a *Just* Internal Government of oneself. (See Conf. VIII.12.29, for example.)

Granted, Plato (in the *Politeia*) calls the forsaking of the pleasures of the body “a mighty necessity” for the True Philosopher (485d–485e), and he also calls the erotic desires the most remote from law and order (587a), but this is tempered by his extensive discussion of Justice within and without, which is a state in which *every part* occupies the position and performs the function *proper to its nature* (433a–433b).

St. Augustine, on the other hand, seems to make a significant leap in the direction of pure asceticism, and in *De Trinitate*, he quotes or paraphrases Wisdom 9:15, which states that “the corruptible body presseth down the soul (et ubi corpus quod corrumpitur aggrauat animam)”, at least *seven times* (II.17.28, III.4.10, III.10.21, IV.3.5, IV.11.14, IV.18.24, VIII.2.3). (The English is from the King James Version.) Hence, we may safely say that this passage constitutes one of his most cherished pieces of Scripture. He does *include* the adjective *corruptible* in his paraphrases, though, which suggests that the *future*, *incorruptible* body of Christian doctrine (mentioned in D.Tr. XIV.19.25) will *not* be pressing down the Soul, and this supposition does appear to find its confirmation in Chapter 91 of the *Enchiridion*.

Like Socrates in the *Politeia*, St. Augustine is *also* convinced that the Soul is immortal, in the sense that it is never *wholly* extinguished or destroyed. For according to St. Augustine, “as long as it is a soul, so long it lives, **and because the soul is always, it**

**always lives** (et quia semper anima est semper uiuit)” (D.Tr. V.4.5).

The kinship between what St. Augustine here says, and the Platonic affirmations we studied earlier, is unmistakable.

Elsewhere in *De Trinitate*, however, he calls the Soul changeable or mutable, as in the following passage:

**“Hoc corpus inspirata anima regit** eademque rationalis, et ideo quamuis **mutabilis** tamen quae possit illius incommutabilis sapientiae particeps esse (...).”

Translation: “(...) **a soul breathed into it governs this body**, and that soul a rational one; which, therefore, although **changeable**, yet can be partaker of that unchangeable wisdom (...).” (D.Tr. III.2.8)

A little later, he denominates the Soul both *changeable* and *made* (or created):

**“(...) for the soul** (anima) also is the life (vita) of the body, but this too **is made, for it is changeable** (mutabilis); and by what was it made, except by the unchangeable Word of God (nisi per dei uerbum incommutabile)?” (D.Tr. IV.1.3, see also “the spiritual creature” in D.Tr. VI.6.8)

But St. Augustine goes even further than that, and declares that

**“We certainly, as no Christian doubts, are dead both in soul and body** (et anima et corpore mortui sumus): in soul, because of sin; in body, because of the punishment of sin, and through this also in body because of sin. **And to both these parts of ourselves**, that is, both to soul and to body, **there was need both of a medicine and of resurrection**, that what had been changed for the worse might be renewed for the better.” (D.Tr. IV.3.5, see also D.Tr. IV.3.6)

His ascribing of changeability to the Soul threatens to involve him in a contradiction, though, as he elsewhere observes, in perfect accordance with Platonic doctrine, that changeability is fundamentally incompatible with Immortality and Eternity, as here:

“For that is not properly called eternal which undergoes any degree of change.”  
(D.Tr. IV.18.24)

Let us see how he tries to solve this problem created by the merging of Immortality with mutability. He admits that

“(…) changeableness itself (*ipsa mutabilitas*) is not unfitly called mortality (*mortalitas*), according to which the soul (*anima*) also is said to die; not because it is changed and turned into body, or into some substance (*substantia*) other than itself, but because, whatever in its own selfsame substance (*substantia*) is now after **another mode** than it once was, is discovered to be mortal, in so far as it has ceased to be what it was.” (D.Tr. II.9.15)

So the Soul changes, while nevertheless remaining in existence. But what does he mean when he says the *mode* of the Soul varies? This is partly answered when he claims that

“(…) **because it** [the *anima*] **lives more when it is wise, and less when it is foolish** (*sed quia magis uiuit cum sapit minusque dum desipit*), here, too, **some change** (*aliqua mutatio*) **comes to pass, not such that life is absent**, as wisdom is absent to the foolish, **but such that it is less** (…).” (D.Tr. V.4.5)

This *variation in the degree of life* in the Soul is contrasted with the Eternity of God, who “remains **altogether unchangeable** (*omnino incommutabilis manet*)”. (D.Tr. V.4.5)

In the case of the Soul, therefore, “death” does *not* mean annihilation, only a certain diminution or darkening. But still the reader of is left desiring further clarity, and this is found in the place where St. Augustine explains that

“*Mors autem animae impietas est et mors corporis corruptibilitas per quam fit et animae a corpore abscessus. Sicut enim anima deo deserente sic corpus anima deserente moritur, unde illa fit insipiens, hoc exanime.*” (D.Tr. IV.3.5)

Translation: “Now **the death of the soul is ungodliness**, and the death of the body is corruptibility, through which comes also a departure of the soul from the body. For as **the soul dies when God leaves it**, so the body dies when the soul leaves it; **whereby the former becomes foolish**, the latter lifeless.”



This doctrine that the “death” of the Soul consists in *the loss of God* (the Good), and in its becoming *foolish*, is reiterated some pages on, where the role of the will, and the autonomy of the Soul when seen in relation to the body, is further accentuated:

“Wherefore, since the spirit (spiritus) [here synonymous with anima] is to be preferred to the body, and the death of the spirit means that God has left it, but the death of the body that the spirit has left it; and since herein lies the punishment in the death of the body, that **the spirit leaves the body against its will, because it left God willingly; so that, whereas the spirit left God because it would, it leaves the body although it would not;** nor leaves it when it would, unless it has offered violence to itself (...).” (D.Tr. IV.13.16)

To summarize, St. Augustine considers the Individual Soul to be both created *and* Immortal, as he himself after a while explicitly affirms: “(...) the nature of the soul is immortal, and **from the first beginning of its creation thenceforth never ceases to be** (...)” (D.Tr. XIV.3.4).

So is there a significant difference between the Augustinian and the Platonic view of the Soul? I would say that it depends on how one reads the term *created*, for even Platonic Beings *are* created, and not *fully* Divine, in the sense that they are not *wholly* independent, but *derive* their Being from the Idea of the Good.

That Platonic creation is *not*, however, an event *in* Time (at least not primarily), but *an eternally occurring overflowing or emanation* – but so is St. Augustine’s, actually, for if I have understood him correctly, which I do think I have (having read Book XI of *Confessions*, which is devoted to precisely this subject), he says that the entire Creation, including everything that *has been* and *is* and *will be* manifested in Time, is eternally created by the Wisdom, the Son, the Beginning, the *Word*, as a *Simultaneous Whole* (Conf. XI.7.9 –XI.11.13).

Our ordinary *understanding* of this subject is, in a sense, the *reverse* of the actual *Reality*.

Creation as a *ready potential* is *prior* to its realization in Time – it is the movement of the Frame or Mirror of Time, as I propose to call it, through the metaphorical Ocean of Potentiality, that gives rise to both the *things themselves* of history and to what *we*, while existing *within* Time, experience as past, present and future. Hence St. Augustine’s own words:

“Thou dost call us, then, to understand the Word – the God who is God with thee – which is spoken eternally and **by which all things are spoken eternally.**” (Conf. XI.7.9) “How wonderful are thy works, O Lord; in wisdom thou hast made them all.’ [Psalm 104:24] “And this **Wisdom is the Beginning, and in that Beginning thou hast made heaven and earth.**” (Conf. XI.9.11)

“In the Eternal (...) nothing passes away, but **the whole is simultaneously present. (...) all, past and future, is created and issues out of that which is forever present.**” (Conf. XI.11.13) “For what is time? Who can easily and briefly explain it?” (Conf. XI.14.17) “Give me leave, O Lord, to seek still further. (...) **if there are times past and future**, I wish to know where they are. But if I have not yet succeeded in this, **I still know that wherever they are, they are not there as future or past, but as present.**” (Conf. XI.18.23)

One might wonder if it is a faded, garbled, popularized memory of this surprisingly advanced conception of Time – an ancient cosmology hair-raisingly evocative of some of the findings of twentieth century *quantum physics*, and far less difficult to reconcile with contemporary geology and biology than a literal reading of Genesis – which has given rise to the notion that the ancients thought of the material cosmos as eternal. It seems possible.

## **The Divine Image – the contemplative capability of the Soul**

This discussion of the Soul brings us to the second stage of this inquiry, which, in line with the procedure in chapter two of this thesis, will be the concept of a Divine Image in human beings.

Unlike Plato, St. Augustine *explicitly* affirms that the Divine Likeness in human beings *is the Soul* (Conf. III.7.12, VI.3.4, VII.9.15), or rather *a part* of the Soul (Conf. XIII.32.47). But since the Soul, as we have just seen, is the higher and better part of St. Augustine's Man, and the highest of the three major parts of Man in Plato is the godlike (θεοείκελος) one, there is not a great deal of difference between these the two positions.

The correspondence between the two conceptions becomes even more apparent when St. Augustine, in *De Trinitate*, denominates the Soul the Inner Man (*interior homo*) (and the body the outer):

“Therefore on this double death of ours [of body and soul] our Saviour bestowed His own single death; and to cause both our resurrections, He appointed beforehand and set forth in mystery and type (in sacramento et exemplo) His own one resurrection. For He was not a sinner or ungodly, that, as though dead in spirit [soul], He should need to be renewed in **the inner man** (in interiore homine) [the soul] (...); but being clothed in mortal flesh, and in that alone dying, in that alone rising again, in that alone did He answer to both for us; since in it was wrought a mystery as regards **the inner man** [the soul], and a type as regards **the outer** [the body]. (D.Tr. IV.3.6)

For what was it we found that Plato says in the *Politeia*? It was that the uppermost part of a human being in this world is “the inner human being” (588d, 589a), and that *this* is the only *truly* human part of us, as it is only this *Inner Man* who resembles the Divine Idea in the Above. (The term “inner human being” is also found in 2 Corinthians 4:16, for example.)

St. Augustine has more to say as regards the Imago Dei, though. The further into *De Trinitate* one digs, the more precisely he expresses himself, until he at last explains that our Reason, as he conceives of it, has *an upper and a lower part*, the latter of which is oriented towards action pertaining to the Temporal, and the former of which is, or may be, oriented towards Contemplation of the Eternal. It is this upper part of the Soul or the Mind (terms he sometimes uses interchangeably; here he uses *mens*) which is properly

called the Image of God (*imago dei*), as this is the part to which Contemplation belongs. (D.Tr. XII.4.4)

Significantly, the Image of God is, like the Soul as a whole, everlasting, for that Image is “the best (melius) thing” the Soul has, the best part *of its created nature* (“in eius natura creatum”), and it endures forever (D.Tr. XIV.3.4). This “noblest part of the human mind, by which it *knows* or can *know* God (ubi principale mentis humanae quo nouit deum uel potest nosse)” (D.Tr. XIV.8.11), may be tarnished, be can *never* be completely wiped out:

“For, as we have said, **although worn out and defaced by losing the participation of God, yet the image of God still remains** (Diximus enim eam etsi amissa dei participatione obsoletam atque deformem dei tamen imaginem permanere). **For it is His image in this very point, that it is capable of Him, and can be partaker of Him;** which **so great good** (quod tam magnum bonum) is only made possible by its being His image. (D.Tr. XIV.8.11)

Lastly, the Image of God in Man could be seen as a Word-Image, the rejuvenation of which was made possible by the Incarnation of the Word in Time – the “descent” of Higher Being into Becoming, one might say. In a discourse on numbers, St. Augustine shows his support for the proposal that Christ is the New Adam, but bases it on his construal of the Imago Dei:

“And Holy Scripture commends to us the perfection of this number [the number six], especially in this, that God finished His works in six days, and **on the sixth day man was made in the image of God**. [As can we, St. Augustine does not see the doctrine of Eternal Creation Above as *irreconcilable* with perceived acts of creation in Time Below] **And the Son of God came and was made the Son of man, that He might re-create us after the image of God (...).**” (D.Tr. IV.4.7)

One could also, I think, formulate this relationship between the Image in us and Christ as an analogy – in a manner reminiscent of (but not identical to, of course) how Christ the Word is the Image of the Father (D.Tr. VI.2.3), so the inner and better part of Man is, or

was meant to be, the Image of Christ. Furthermore, when reflecting on this, let us not forget that the Hellenic terms ἰδέα and εἶδος have, as two of their potential meanings, beautiful appearance and *countenance* (Beekes, 2010, pp. 379–380, 577).

## The Eye of the Soul in St. Augustine – the Edge and the Heart

But what of the Eye of the Soul we studied in Plato? Is there an equivalent concept in St. Augustine? There *is* indeed. Considering what has been said before, there *has* to be, since Contemplation is concerned with *spiritual seeing*, and *not* with dianoetic deliberation.

Interestingly, the origin of this important term (*contemplo*, “I gaze steadfastly at”) is the idea of examining a certain selected portion of *the night sky* (the Latin *templum*), for the purpose of augury or divination based on the stars therein (Valpy, 1828, pp. 99, 408), and so, the application of the term Contemplation to the beholding of the Divine could be seen as arising out of the very same comparison as the one explaining Platonic Astronomy. Similarly, the Latin *templum* (temple, holy place) could be construed as a region of the starry heavens – in both a literal and a metaphorical sense – referenced architecturally on Planet Earth.

In *Confessions*, St. Augustine tends to call the Contemplative Organ or Faculty the Eye of the Soul (*oculus animae*), as in the passage referred to earlier (Conf. VII.10.16), where he mentions one of his encounters with the Immutable Light of the Divine:

Intravi et vidi qualicumque **oculo animae meae supra** eundem **oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem**. (Conf. VII.10.16)

Translation: “And I entered, and with **the eye of my soul** – such as it was – saw **above the same eye of my soul and above my mind the Immutable Light**.”

Here we should also take note of how he clearly *distinguishes* between his own Mind and

the Immutable Light – as he also does in a number of other places in his works. The fact that something is described as existing, in a sense, *within* oneself, or as found by way of a retreating *into* oneself, does not necessarily mean that it is an integral *part* of oneself. (Consider Luke 17:20–21, John 18:36)

This is an important point, as one of the preeminent errors of Modernity (as I tend to view the matter) is caused by the *inability* or *reluctance* to conceive of the Divine as Objectively Real (in the Platonic sense) – a psychological tendency leading to the conflation of God Himself with some part of oneself or the world – and this then allows for a dangerous and misleading *Subjectivism*, since there is no awareness of that Eternal Measure in the Truly Above, wholly independent of all earthly flux, and it may *also* give rise to the seductive, but treacherous fantasy that we human beings might actually one day replace and take on the role of God.

This pattern of *role-reversal* – the notion that we *could* and *should* become our own God, and create our own Paradise and even our own immortality – permeates much of modern thought (and the ideology of Transhumanism is a perfect example of such thinking).

The Eye of the Soul is present in *De Trinitate* as well, but there he seems to prefer the expression the Eye of the (Human) Mind, as the translator of the Latin calls his expression in English. The Latin expression itself, however, consists of the words *mens* and *acies*, as in “quia **mentis** humanae **acies**” (D.Tr. I.2.4), “eorum potuerunt **aciem mentis**” (D.Tr. IV.15.20), “in aeternitatem spiritalis incommutabilisque naturae **aciem mentis**” (D.Tr. IV.17.23) and “quae est **mentis acies**” (D.Tr. XIV.19.26).

As explained above, St. Augustine sometimes uses *mens* as synonymous with *anima*, so that change, by itself, need not mean very much. But why does he make the move from *oculus* to *acies*?

This new term can have several meanings, such as sharp edge, point, the pupil of the eye or a battle array. So what is it St. Augustine intends to convey by this substitution?

I see four possible explanations, which could all be applicable. The first is that he views *acies* as a more abstract term than *oculus*, less likely to call forth corporeal misconceptions in those to whom the spiritual is still an undiscovered country. The second is that *acies* has the sense of the uppermost or outermost *edge* of something, and therefore better illustrates which part of the Soul he is treating of. As the third I propose some rather obscure consideration having to do with the psychology developed in *De Trinitate*, where, as we have seen, the Contemplative Faculty is said to be the Imago Dei, and as the fourth I offer his comment on and his quotation from the concluding part of Cicero's *Hortensius* (now lost), the very work which first kindled in him, at the age of 19, the Love of Wisdom, i.e. True Philosophy (Conf. III.4.7–8):

**“This contemplative wisdom, which I believe is properly called wisdom as distinct from knowledge** in the sacred writings; but wisdom only of man, which yet man has not except from Him, by **partaking** of whom a rational and intellectual mind can be made truly wise; – **this contemplative wisdom, I say, it is that Cicero commends, in the end of the dialogue *Hortensius*, when he says: ‘While, then, we consider these things night and day, and sharpen our understanding [intellegentia], which is the eye of the mind [mentis acies],** taking care that it be not ever dulled, that is, while we live in philosophy; we, I say, in so doing, have great hope that, if, on the one hand, this sentiment and wisdom of ours is mortal and perishable, we shall still, when we have discharged our human offices, have a pleasant setting, and a not painful extinction, and as it were a rest from life: or if, on the other, as ancient philosophers thought, – and those, too, the greatest and far the most celebrated, – we have souls eternal and divine, then must we needs think, that the more these shall have always kept in their own proper course, i.e. in reason and in the desire of inquiry, and the less they shall have mixed and entangled themselves in the vices and errors of men, the more easy ascent and return they will have to heaven. (...)’.” (D.Tr. XIV.19.26)

What is noteworthy in relation to the present inquiry in the above quote from the *Hortensius* is that Cicero uses the very same Latin expression, “mentis acies”, as St.

Augustine has adopted, and Cicero's conception of *acies* is very clear – it is that of an edge or blade which may be sharpened or become dulled.

Moreover, Cicero uses the noun *intellegentia* in more or less the same way as St. Augustine often uses it (“Quae nobis, inquit, dies noctesque considerantibus acuentibusque intellegentiam quae est mentis acies ...”), namely in the sense of a faculty of power which is *our own* – providing further confirmation of the observation that it cannot be the equivalent of Plato's Nous. But *unlike* St. Augustine, he does not distinguish between *intelligentia* and *mentis acies*. Could it be that the beginning of the conflation of Nous with Ratio or Dianoia goes all the way back to the Roman adoption of Hellenic philosophy?

St. Augustine has yet another term for the Eye or the Organ of the Soul, however – the *Heart*. That this term is used as an alternative way of referring to the Contemplative Faculty is amply demonstrated by several passages in *De Trinitate*, such as I.8.17, VIII.2.3 and VIII.4.6 – the most illustrative of which is probably the third one.

As I think that passage is sufficient to show, the Heart (*cor*) is spoken of in the same way as the Eye of the Soul, i.e. as an entity *potentially* capable of seeing or knowing or contemplating God – possibly due to influence from the Bible. Furthermore, like Plato's Organ, it is said to be in need of cleansing or purification – the Augustinian conception of which I shall soon be elaborating on.

## **The Purification of the Eye of the Soul in St. Augustine**

I will now ask a question which the reader, considering what we have been through, will probably be able to guess the answer to. May the Eye of the Mind, or the Edge of the Mind, or whatever we choose to translate “*mentis acies*” as, engage in the beholding of



the Eternal Word whenever the carrier of that Organ, the Soul, desires to do so? St. Augustine's response, if based on *De Trinitate*, would quite clearly be no. It must first be *purified*. Could we also say *rekindled*? That will be considered once purification has been dealt with.

The concept of a *stage* of purification is already familiar to us. However, the *method* of purification is one of the areas in which the Augustinian doctrine of Contemplation differs from the Platonic one, at least *outwardly*. For in *De Trinitate*, the process of detachment and elevation assigned by Plato to the Art of the Turning Around of the Soul (518d) is instead assigned to Faith, which is the cognitive function called by Plato Pistis (πίστις) – often translated as Trust – the function belonging to the *upper section* of the Realm of Opinion (δόξα, doxa) or Becoming (γένεσις, genesis).

This is, in one way, a major change, but it is not as *alien* to Platonism as some have believed it to be. As I intend to show further on, St. Augustine actually takes an aspect of Plato's Divided Line (509d ff.) – one which I myself vividly remember as having surprised me when I first encountered it, and as having recalled in me the frequently cited scriptural statement that “faith (πίστις) is the substance (ὑπόστασις) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, KJV) – and, in what might be described as one of the highlights of *De Trinitate*, turns it into an argument *for* the efficacy of Christian Faith.

Incidentally, the view that Faith and Philosophy are irreconcilably opposed to one another was eloquently *censured* by Dr. Cocker, in his dated but erudite work *Christianity and Greek Philosophy* (1870, p. vii).

But for now, let us return to the Augustinian conception of purification. The Eye of the Mind, when in its ordinary state, is weak, and would, if it were to attempt Contemplation, and should, for a moment, succeed, be dazzled by and overwhelmed by the Immutable,

Transcendent Light emitted by the Eternal Word. (The overwhelming nature of the Light of Higher Being, necessitating a *careful* and *gradual* ascent, is also a theme in the *Politeia*, cf. 516a–516b, for example) Hence, before it may enter into a state of prolonged Communion with the Divine, it must first be “invigorated by the nourishment of the righteousness of faith.” (D.Tr. I.2.4)

Here, St. Augustine speaks of Faith as providing *nourishment*, but its *purifying effect* is a much more frequently emphasized aspect. One could say that the latter is one of the major themes of *De Trinitate*.

Why are we in need of purification? The weakness of the Eye is the reason. But why is the Eye weak? We are “not fit to take hold of things eternal [Higher Being]” he says – as opposed to merely catching *glimpses* of them – and the reason is that “the foulness of sins”, which we have “contracted by the love of temporal things [the things of Becoming]”, and which are “implanted in us as it were naturally, from the root of mortality”, weighs us down. It is therefore “needful” to be cleansed. (D.Tr. IV.18.24)

What does this cleansing consist in? As we may easily deduce from the argument itself, it must involve our attaining to *detachment* from the Temporal, so that the bonds keeping us down, formed by our love for it, are sundered. But this is fundamentally the same idea of *captivity and liberation* as the one found in the *Politeia* (514a–516b) – and also, I might add, in some of the schools of Vedanta, for example.

In St. Augustine’s schema, this process of detachment is also called *dying* to “carnal affections (carnales affectus)”, or *dying* to “this world (hic mundus)”. He even posits a *direct correlation* between the *degree* to which we have so died and the *degree* to which we are able to “spiritually understand (spiritaliter intellegimus) the wisdom of God (dei sapientiam)”. (D.Tr. II.17.28)

This is strong language, and it certainly constitutes the taking of another step in the direction of asceticism if compared to Plato's. Is it justified? I am not in a position to judge. What is clear is that *some* degree of subjugation of the physical body was what many of the ancient sages – and not only those of Platonism and Patristic Christianity – advocated as a necessary part of their Paths to Liberation or Salvation or Divine Enlightenment.

Once begun, this process may, according to St. Augustine, set in motion something like an upward spiral of spiritual development. The *more* the Soul dies to carnal things, the *purier* (“mundior”) it becomes, and the purer it becomes, the more it *rises* to spiritual things (“ad spiritalia resurgens”), and more it rises to *spiritual* things, the more it *longs* for the Idea (“species”) of God, and the more it so *longs*, the more it *dies* to carnal things, etc. (D.Tr. II.17.28) This, it seems, is the *first* of the two resurrections – the resurrection of the *Soul* (D.Tr. IV.3.5).

Incidentally, we may note that spiritual *longing*, and its potential effect of *pulling the Soul upward*, away from this world, is also mentioned in the *Politeia* (“ἐφίεται ὁμιλιῶν”, “the Communion for which She longs”, 611e).

But what does this cleansing Faith *consist in*? St. Augustine's answer is that it is the loving of God with the Mind (or Soul) *before* He is Seen, for “except He is loved by faith, it will not be possible for the Heart [the same Organ as the Eye] to be cleansed, in order that it may be apt and meet to see Him.” (D.Tr. VIII.4.6)

### **Contemplation of the Word itself – the End (Goal) of all our actions**

If accomplished, purification by Faith eventually results in Contemplation, which is the ability to *unwaveringly* and *continually* behold and commune with God. This is

contrasted with our *present* condition, in which St. Augustine claims that even *philosophers* are unable to *fix* the Eye *firmly* upon Eternity (D.Tr. IV.17.23) – obviously an assertion some of the ancient philosophers would have taken issue with.

Put in Platonic terms, this purification is the emergence from the Tyranny of the Unnecessary Desires (559c–559d), and then, probably, from all the other lower types of inner Governments as well, until, at last, one reaches the establishing of Inner Kingship (580c, 587e) – all of which must be accomplished while trusting and loving a Wisdom which is *unknown*.

But what does this Contemplation entail? As stated above, St. Augustine makes Contemplation the *reward*, primarily in the hereafter, of Faith in the here and now. “For contemplation is the recompense of faith (Contemplatio quippe merces est fidei), for which recompense our hearts are purified by faith,” as he says. (D.Tr. I.8.17)

This Contemplation will consist in the spiritual *seeing* of the *Highest Good* (summum bonum), which, in St. Augustine, is the only True God (D.Tr. I.2.4, D.Tr. III.2.8). For *this* is “that which is discerned by the most purified minds (purgatissimis mentibus cernitur)”. (D.Tr. I.2.4)

He expresses himself even more precisely further on, though. What we will be rewarded with, as a result of having “accepted by our faith” the flesh which the Word was made “in the fullness of time”, is “the Word itself, by whom all things were made”, the Eternal Word, which was *kept back*, and *not* shown, but which will be “contemplated in eternity by the mind when cleansed by faith”. (D.Tr. IV.19.26) One of the characteristics of Eternal Life is, in other words, the *everlasting beholding* of Christ Himself, as He truly *is*.

In the hereafter, that is also how we will be *renewed*. Perhaps one could say *nourished*? For in this earthly life (“nunc”) we are “cleansed through faith (per fidem mundati)”, but

then (“tunc”), in the hereafter, in Eternity, we will be “renewed by sight (per speciem redintegrati)”. (D.Tr. IV.7.11)

This Contemplation will not be something we may treat in whatever way we please, though – it will be an *obligation*, for as “the rational mind (Mens autem rationalis)”, “when needing cleansing, owes faith to things temporal [the Incarnation, etc.]”, so it, “when cleansed (sicut purgata)”, “owes contemplation to things eternal (contemplationem debet rebus aeternis)”. (D.Tr. IV.18.24)

This statement should probably be taken to mean that we will have a *moral* obligation to *adore* the Savior. For it will be perfectly natural to worship Him in gratitude forever, with a *steadfast gaze* of devotion, once we have been *permanently* delivered from *all strife*.

But then “we shall not seek anything else, when we shall have come to the contemplation of Him.” (D.Tr. I.8.17) For the Contemplation of the Eternal Word is the End (“finis”), meaning the Goal or Fulfillment or Consummation – of Human Existence (D.Tr. I.8.17), the Marriage of which the earthly marriage is a dim resemblance. A Hellenic philosopher would have used the term τέλος (telos).

It was for *this* End we were made, and it was *from* this End we were diverted, when we were tempted to enthrone *our own Reason* as our god, in the place of the True God, and *to* this End we will one day be lastingly *restored*, because the End Himself deigned to heroically dive into this ocean of Ignorance and Slavery, so as to restore a state of Justice in Man, and to blaze, for all of us, a path back to the Above. We have drunk deeply of the River of Carelessness, but we may still return to the Fountain of Truth before it is too late.

So I am stirred to sum up St. Augustine’s words, of which these form one of the climaxes:

“(…) when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.’ [Col 3:3–4] Before which time, ‘we see now through a glass, in an enigma,’ that is, in similitudes, ‘but then face to face.’ [1 Cor 13:12] **For this contemplation is held forth to us as the end of all actions** (actionum omnium finis), **and the everlasting fullness of joy** (aeterna perfectio gaudiorum).” (D.Tr. I.8.17)

What Contemplation will mean is also stated in a most interesting and illustrative way in *Confessions*, in XII.13.16, in the passage we considered during the discussion of *Intellect* in the previous chapter.

In sum, Faith is not an end in itself, it is rather the *means* by which one attains to Contemplation – momentarily, perhaps, in this life, and then, in the Life after this life, continually and forever.

### **Is Contemplation the equivalent of Noesis?**

Since one of the purposes of this inquiry is a *comparison of ideas*, some important questions still remain at least partially unanswered, however. I have demonstrated the presence of an Eye of the Soul in both Plato and St. Augustine. But *is* St. Augustine’s act of Contemplation *fully* comparable to Plato’s act of Noesis? If so, then what is the equivalent of Plato’s *event* of *Nous* (which occurs as the result of the receiving of a Noetic *genus*) in St. Augustine? Or, to put it another way, *is* that which is seen during Contemplation the *same* as that which is seen during Noesis, and just *what* is it that makes the event or state of Sight (*species* or ὄψις, *opsis*) that is Contemplation *possible*?

What I view as the solutions to these riddles has already been summarily stated in the list of revised definitions, but let us now examine the enigmas before us more closely.

I shall begin with the question of *what* it is that is seen. In Plato, the *objects of Sight* in

Higher Being are the Eternal Beings or Ideas – usually, it seems to me, the lesser of these, but sometimes also the Supreme Idea, the Idea of the Good. St. Augustine does not say very much of the lesser Ideas, but he does say a great deal of something which closely resembles the Idea of the Good, namely the Eternal Word. So the crux of the matter is, to put it bluntly: Are the two in actuality one and the same God – the same God seen from two different, but intimately related perspectives, perhaps?

*Both* are the eternally generated or begotten (“unigenitus”, Conf. V.3.5, “unigenitum tuum”, Conf. V.10.20, “always born”, D.Tr. V.5.6, “ἐγεννησεν”, *Politeia* 508c, from γεννάω, gennao) Child or Offspring (ἐκγονος, ekgonos, *Politeia* 506e–507a, 508c, τόκος, tokos, 507a) of a Divine Entity called the Father (πατήρ, pater, *Politeia* 506e). For a *son* is the child and offspring of his father, is he not? Moreover, in Plato’s Higher Being or St. Augustine’s Eternity, there is no such thing as “past” or “future”, hence, generation or begetting is not, and indeed *cannot* possibly be, a “one-time event”.

Furthermore, *both* are referred to as Lord or Ruler (e.g. dominus, Conf. VII.8.12, κυρία, *Politeia* 517d), as Idea or Appearance (species, D.Tr. II.17.28, ἰδέα, *Politeia* 505a, 508e, 517b) and as Wisdom (sapientia, D.Tr. II.17.31, D.Tr. IV.13.18, D.Tr. IV.20.27, σοφία, *Politeia* 429a, 475b). Granted, the latter appellation is not *explicitly* applied to the Idea of the Good in the *Politeia*, but may be inferred from the etymology of *philosophy*, and from the fact that the Idea of the Good, like the Wisdom in Proverbs and in the Wisdom of Solomon, is *feminine*, for example.

The Supreme Idea is also called the Greatest [Philosophical] Study (*Politeia* 505a).

Moreover, *both* are, as we have seen, closely associated with a dazzling, Divine Light, and with Truth and Knowledge (although St. Augustine does *not* distinguish clearly between Truth and a *Provider* of Truth, as is evident in D.Tr. IV.18.24, for example), and even with the continual, everlasting creation of a Simultaneous Whole (Conf. XI.11.13,

D.Tr. IV.1.3, *Politeia* 379b–379c, 486a–486b, 509b), which gives rise to the Temporal by way of the movement of chronological Time.

### **A consideration of essences and analogies**

There is *one* possible difference between the two Ideas or Countenances which could be highly significant, however, but both its existence and its significance depend, to some extent, on how Plato and St. Augustine are interpreted. It has to do with how the Entity in question is conceived of in relation to Eternity or Higher Being or That Which Is, and also with the exact nature of the relation, present in *both* cases, between the Begetter and the Begotten, or the Father and the Child.

This much seems certain: The Father in Plato, the Good itself (and probably identical to the One), is spoken of, as mentioned earlier, as existing *beyond* Being (509b), while there is no mention in St. Augustine of a God *beyond* Eternity or Being. Hence, to make the two schemas line up perfectly beside each other, we would have to either move Plato's "Beyond-Being" (or "Super-Being") into the upper part of St. Augustine's Eternity, or move the summit of St. Augustine's Eternity into Plato's "Beyond-Being".

The difficulty with the latter solution is that St. Augustine clearly identifies the Eternal Word with some unspecified part of Higher Being (as in D.Tr. I.8.17 and D.Tr. IV.18.24, for example), and this identification, combined with *the doctrine of the Trinity*, with its thesis of the co-equality, con-substantiality and co-eternality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (partially articulated in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 A.D., and fully developed in *De Trinitate*), causes him to want to equate *the Father* with that part of Higher Being *as well*, so as to be able to say that the Father is of the very same Essence or Ousia or Substance as the Son, and vice versa.



This is so in spite of the fact that St. Augustine equates God as a whole, i.e. the Trinity, with “the Good itself” (“ipsum bonum”, D.Tr. VIII.3.4, “ipsius boni”, D.Tr. VIII.3.5), “the Good of All Good” (“bonum omnis boni”, D.Tr. VIII.3.4), “the Good Good” (“bonum bonum”, D.Tr. VIII.3.4) and “the Chief Good” (“summum bonum”, D.Tr. VIII.3.5). In one remarkable chapter he even repeatedly calls God “the One” (D.Tr. IV.7.11).

St. Augustine is *not*, in other words, philosophizing (meaning *knowing*) his way to the above mentioned Trinitarian theology – what he is actually engaging in, as far as the Trinity is concerned, is an attempt to make a complex Platonic philosophical theological schema fit a preconceived doctrine (based on one of a number of possible interpretations of Scripture) by *merging* several different gradations into a *single* undifferentiated (or almost undifferentiated) plane.

He *does* style the Father the Beginning (*principium*) of the whole Deity, however (D.Tr. IV.20.29), and, considering what the appellation Father indicates, he could hardly do otherwise.

The former solution does not seem very acceptable either, for it violates what looks to me like a fundamental Platonic dictum, namely that the originator of a certain level must itself be prior to and superior to that level, at least in terms of rank (c.f. *Politeia* 509b). But then one could nevertheless ask: Given that the Idea of the Good is the Eternal Idea or Appearance of the Good itself, then *how different* can it really be from that Good itself, which is its Father?

Could it be that orthodox Christianity is essentially correct when it says that the Father and the Son are of one and the same Essence? Or could it be that the doctrine of the Trinity was somewhat rashly or inadequately articulated, as a result of a desire to make Christian theology conform, as closely as possible, to the pre-Christian, Israelite emphasis on the Oneness of YHWH (Deuteronomy 6:4), and that the more subtle

gradations of Platonic theology were given *insufficient* consideration?

There is, after all, no *explicit* mention of a Trinity consisting of co-equal, con-substantial and co-eternal Persons anywhere in the New Testament, only a number of often isolated and rather enigmatic propositions (like those of Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:22, for example) which could, it seems to me, be just as well explained by Platonic metaphysics and cosmology as they have been by orthodox Trinitarianism.

I have no ready answer to these questions. All I will say here is that I *do* find it probable that the Ultimate, First Cause of all Being and all Becoming must itself be *beyond* all Being and Becoming.

As regards the question of what it is that is seen, I would propose the following logos or argument: If the Idea of the Good is viewed as *ontologically distinct* from the Good itself, so that the former is located at the *summit* of Being, but *within Being*, while the latter is *beyond* the summit of Being, then it follows that there are *two* essences involved – an actual Essence in the case of the Idea, and a “Super-Essence” in the case of the Good itself.

In *this* model, the Idea of the Good is the *Bridge* between the Supraessential and the Essential, between the Noetic and the “Supranoetic”, and the relationship between the Idea of the Good and the Good itself is made *analogous* to that which is said to exist (517b–517c) between *our* sun, Helios, and the Idea of the Good. Both the Idea and Helios constitute a “crossing over” from one plane or dimension to another.

One advantage to this model is that it provides a convincing way to make sense of certain important and frequently discussed statements attributed to Christ, such as the much debated “no one cometh unto the father, but by [or through] me.” (John 14:6, English Revised Version) For it enables one to say that *this is so* because the Eternal Word, which

Plato saw as the Idea of the Good, is the one and only Bridge between Higher Being and the Father, and therefore the Highest *Knowable* God.

However, if we *instead* focus on the aspect of the Idea of the Good which is its role as the Showing or continually *emanated* (D.Tr. IV.20.27) Image of the Good itself, and take this to mean that the relationship between the Begotten and the Begetter is analogous to that which exists between the *light* of Helios and Helios *itself*, then it follows that *both* the Idea and its Origin are in one and the same Realm, since the sun and its light are certainly *both* in Higher Becoming.

One advantage to this model is that it makes the Idea to be of the same Essence as its Origin. But are they now both in (or more or less identical to) *Higher* Being, or are they both in *Super-Being*?

If the former is true, then we would have to explicate Plato's statement concerning the Good itself as meaning that the Good itself is at *the very summit* of Higher Being, but *not* actually *beyond* Higher Being. This would, however, fit well with St. Augustine's theology.

If, on the other hand, the latter is true, which I am inclined to think it is, since the Idea of the Good is the *Provider of Truth* and *Nous* (508e, 517b–517c), but not either of these itself, then we are faced with the problem of explaining how the Supraessential crosses over into the Essential. But since Divine Light is certainly present *within* (or a *constituent* of) the Essential, we cannot, if this scenario is accepted, avoid the conclusion that it is this *Divine Light* that *somehow* accomplishes the crossing, or that it is somehow the *result* of the crossing.

## The eye, its “sun-likeness”, and the kindling of fire

If we delve even deeper into this matter, there is also the question of precisely what the Soul sees when it is said that it *sees* Immutable or Divine Light. *Does* it see that Light as it is *in itself*? I shall now propose yet another analogy, but bear with me, for we are closing in on something intriguing:

“As Helios is to the human body, so the Idea of the Good is to the Soul.”

But what, then, is the relation between the sun and the human body? I would suggest that the light provided by Helios could be said to *kindle a fire* (in modern, scientific language nerve impulses) when it enters the bodily eye, and this metaphorical fire then goes on to fill the whole body with a *likeness* of light – and with likenesses of that likeness (various chemical substances) also. In a similar but *far greater* fashion, then, the Divine Light provided by the Idea of the Good kindles a True Fire when it enters the Eye of the Soul – a Fire which then proceeds to flood the entire Soul with a likeness of that True Light.

What this implies as regards the Essence problem is that the Soul could be in Higher Being, and yet “see” something beyond that Realm, just as the “inside” of the body, while in Lower Becoming, nevertheless “sees” something in Higher Becoming. For the visual faculty of our brain, when active, sees a world which we are accustomed to thinking of as located outside of ourselves, when, in actuality, all we are really seeing, strictly speaking, is an *image* of the outside world, located *inside of ourselves*.

Where is Nous in this equation? It is the Fire which is kindled when the purified Eye is rekindled or lit, and this Fire is, then, the event of Sight, which is Nous *realized*, which is Contemplation, which is Objective Knowledge, which is Wisdom *received*.

This argument is not, I think, as far-fetched as it might seem to some, for it is quite

consistent with Plato's extensive analogy, and Plato even calls the human eye *sun-like* (“ἡλιοειδέστατος”; ἡλιοειδές, 508b). It is also capable, I would say, of explaining the words attributed to Christ in Matthew 6:22–23 and Luke 11:34–36 – which do need explaining.

For if they are taken in a purely physical sense, they form, like so many other metaphors, mere platitudes. To take them literally is comparable to saying that the Cross of Christ is *only* two planks of wood put together. It is the invisible, higher meaning that imbues them with value and power, whether that meaning is *wholly visible* or only *faintly glimpsed*.

## The place of the Holy Spirit

But there is one crucial actor which I have not yet mentioned – or so it seems – and which must be identified if we are to complete the comparison of Plato's Idea of the Good with St. Augustine's *summum bonum*.

Let us recall that St. Augustine found nearly all of Christian theology, with the notable exception of the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection, in Platonic literature (Conf. VII.9.13–14). Perhaps that is a somewhat hyperbolic statement, but if the view of Christian theology which it encapsulates is largely true, as I think this inquiry is demonstrating that it is, then we should be able to find the Holy Spirit in the Platonic metaphysical schema. To do so is made somewhat challenging by the comparative lack of detailed statements concerning that Spirit in *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*, but let us see what St. Augustine has to say.

The Holy Spirit “is the Spirit both of the Father and of the Son”, and “is called the gift of God [Acts 8:20]”, he states. (D.Tr. V.11.12) But *how* is it *the gift of God*? “(...) the Spirit

is a gift eternally, but a thing that has been given in time (sempiternae spiritus donum, temporaliter autem donatum).” (D.Tr. V.16.17)

Considering what St. Augustine elsewhere says of Eternity and Time, portions of which I have mentioned before, this clearly means that the Holy Spirit, in St. Augustine’s eyes, is a *continual emanation* of and from the Deity – an emanation which *always is* in Higher Being, but which, when Time gives rise to the Temporal, is experienced as an event, or as a temporary state, in the life of earthly Man. Like the Son (D.Tr. V.5.6), the Holy Spirit never began to be, but *always is* – in the case of the latter because it is *eternally* a *gift*.

Likewise, the Holy Spirit, like the Son, must somehow be part over the never-ending overflowing or effulgence of that Highest Good which is God, for of the Son he says the following:

“What wonder, therefore, if He [the Word] is sent, not because He is unequal with the Father, but because He is ‘a pure [or clear] emanation issuing from the glory [or brightness] of the Almighty God?’ (est manatio quaedam claritatis omnipotentis dei sinceris) [see Wisdom 7:25 in Greek, and “ἀπαύγασμα”].” (D.Tr. IV.20.27)

The Holy Spirit, St. Augustine observes, is also called “‘The salvation of the Lord’ [Psalm 3:8]” and “is said also to be our salvation, who have received it.” (D.Tr. V.14.15)

He does not elaborate on this, though, but, as we know from elsewhere, the Holy Spirit is linked, albeit somewhat obliquely, to purification (or washing) and rebirth (or regeneration), as in John 3:5 and Titus 3:5, and to fire, as in Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16, Acts 2:3 and perhaps Mark 9:49 (Dr. Grimes once argued that “salt” is an ancient metaphor for what we have defined as Nous).

This bleaching and dyeing, as one might call it, then enables the one so regenerated to enter (in the sense of gaining access to) the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven,

which is, as should already be obvious, Higher Being or Eternity, and *not* a kingdom in the ordinary, carnal sense. In the Augustinian schema, this happens by way of Faith.

We have, then, an Entity which is continually a gift, regardless of whether anyone is willing to receive it or not, an Entity which is itself Divine, and which, when received, results in the Salvation of the Receiver – an Entity which is associated with Fire and Knowledge.

The only Entity which fits this description in the Platonic works under consideration is Nous – but then Nous fits it remarkably well. For, as I have shown, Nous is, in a sense, a gift (or a donation), since it is provided by the Idea of the Good, and it is also associated with kindling, and it does lead to Salvation from Hades – at least for a time. There are, of course, differences, but the parallels between the two Entities are striking, and far too great, I think, to be purely coincidental.

This correlation of the Holy Spirit with Nous would appear to find its confirmation in the words of none other than St. Paul himself, for in 1 Corinthians 2, he speaks of a Wisdom (σοφία) which is not of the present world or age (αἰὼν, a word with several meanings), and therefore not temporal, and this Wisdom is the result of the reception of the Spirit of God (τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ), and this reception of the Spirit causes one to have the Mind of the Lord (νοῦν Κυρίου), the Mind of Christ (νοῦν Χριστοῦ). As is fairly evident, the reception of the Holy Spirit is equated with Wisdom, which is clearly used in the same sense as Plato's Knowledge, and also with having the Mind of Christ – and the word translated as "Mind" is νοῦς, Nous.

In fact, once 1 Corinthians 2 is read with the Platonic metaphysical schema in mind, St. Paul's words are found to *not only* found fit into it with *remarkable* precision – considering who their author is supposed to be – but are also revealed to be significantly expounded by it.

## The justification of Faith as sufficient, and Plato's Divided Line

Now that this comparison has been carried out, and that the possibility of a suprarational mental *state*, enabling Divine Communion and Objective Knowledge, has not only been shown to be a doctrine held by both Plato and St. Augustine, but to be a crucial part of the Platonic and the Augustinian schema, and, moreover, that this mental state is made possible by the provision of Nous in the former, and by the giving of the Holy Spirit in the latter, I could proceed to conclude this investigation. There is, however, one remaining subject which I promised to look more closely at, namely St. Augustine's use of Plato's Divided Line in his argument *for* the saving efficacy of Faith. As far as I am able to judge, this is such an extraordinary feature of *De Trinitate* that I simply cannot pass over it in silence. The final task, then, is to hoist this large and gleaming *capstone* (θριγκός, thrigkos, 534e) into place, but whether that capstone will, to the eyes of the reader, have the appearance of gold or silver, or merely bronze or iron, will, I surmise, depend on his or her attachment to Becoming.

The extraordinary passage I am talking about is located in Book IV, Chapter 18 of *De Trinitate*. One could say that this brief chapter is a sort of condensed *key* to the whole Augustinian metaphysical schema, for there it is clearly revealed that Eternity (aeternitas) is Being, and that *That Which has a Beginning* (in Time) (ortus) is Becoming, for example. But as regards the issue of Faith (fides), one of the crucial sentences is the following:

“Dixit quidam et illorum qui quondam apud graecos sapientes habiti sunt:  
**Quantum ad id quod ortum est aeternitas ualet, tantum ad fidem ueritas.**”  
(D.Tr. IV.18.24)

Translation: “One even of those who were formerly esteemed wise men among the Greeks has said, **The truth stands to faith in the same relation in which eternity stands to that which has a beginning.**”



What is so remarkable about this sentence? It is that this is not any kind of sentence, but a *formal analogy*, having the typical form where one pair of terms are said to stand in a certain *relationship* or *proportion* to another pair of terms. Moreover, this is the only prominent example of such an analogy in *De Trinitate*, and it is even *repeated* word for word near the end of the chapter, leaving no doubt as regards the importance assigned to it by St. Augustine.

But even that it not all, for this analogy is effectively a paraphrase, *almost* a direct quote, from a certain part of Plato's *Politeia*, 534a, where Socrates returns to and further explicates the so-called Divided Line (509d ff.). What Socrates there says is that Essence (οὐσία) and Noesis (νόησις) has *the same relation* to Becoming (γένεσις) or Opinion (δόξα) as Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) has to *Trust* or *Faith* (πίστις) and Understanding (διάνοια) to Image-Thinking (εἰκασία).

But what was it I quoted St. Augustine as saying? If we make Truth Knowledge, Faith Trust, Eternity Essence and That Which Has a Beginning Becoming – correlations which, as I have shown before, are perfectly reasonable, then there is an *exact* match between the two analogies – in spite of their existing in different languages. This match would, by itself, be enough to posit an intimate link between them, but St. Augustine does not leave the reader clueless, but explicitly states that the analogy was uttered by a certain *Greek*, whom the past esteemed *wise*, and St. Augustine then goes on to add that “he is no doubt right in saying so (profecto est uera sententia)”.

What I find puzzling about this is that St. Augustine gives this analogy the form of a quote, and tells us that it comes from a wise Greek of history, and that he himself agrees with it, and then neglects to mention the name of that Greek. Is this a very subtle sort of *humor*, a way to *tease* the reader?

I suspect that it is, for in his affirmation, St. Augustine calls the analogy “*uera sententia*”,

a *true opinion* – which is, again, a technical, Platonic philosophical term (585b) – as if having a little terminological fun with that unnamed companion of his.

However that may be, the quoted analogy, together with the affirmation of it, is, to my mind at least, a statement of momentous significance, for with it St. Augustine adopts, with a single stroke of the pen, as it were, what is arguably a distilled form of the very core of the Platonic metaphysical and cosmological schema – the one where two different realms, four distinct planes and four different psychological states are shown to subsist in a hierarchy, and to be *proportioned* according to their nature and their ranks.

But how does this become an argument for Trust or Faith? The argument is, in a sense, inherent in the analogy itself, as well as in the schema it refers to. Faith is to Truth as the Temporal is to Eternity – Trust is to Knowledge as Becoming is to Essence. Phrased differently, Faith *here* is *like* (akin to) Knowledge *there* – for Faith or Trust, as the *Politeia* explains, is the best of the *Becoming-specific* cognitive states, being better than both double ignorance and Image-Thinking, and a *shadow* or *likeness* of Knowledge, just as Image-Thinking is a *shadow* or *likeness* of Understanding. St. Augustine goes further than that, however, and posits that Faith engenders a link between the believer and that which is believed in, which, in the transition to the Afterlife, will *pull* us into Eternity, so to speak, and cause that which is now mere Faith to become Truth, Reality.

At present, in *this* life, our Faith “stands as far apart” from the Clarity (*perspicuitas*) of *Truth* (*ueritas*), by which we are promised Eternal Life (*vita aeterna*), “as mortality (*mortalitas*) does from Eternity (*aeternitas*)”, he observes (D.Tr. IV.18.24). But, and this is a crucial point:

“Nunc ergo adhibemus **fidem rebus temporaliter** gestis propter nos et **per ipsam mundamur** ut cum **ad speciem uenerimus** quemadmodum **succedit fidei ueritas** ita **mortalitati succedat aeternitas.**” (D.Tr. IV.18.24)

Translation: “We then now put **faith in things done in time** [the Incarnation etc.] on our account, and **by that faith itself we are cleansed**; in order that when we have **come to sight**, as **truth follows faith**, so **eternity may follow upon mortality.**”

It is a union between the Eternal and ourselves – made possible by Christ the Truth having taken a beginning in Time, congruent with our own, while retaining His Eternity, and accepted or accomplished by Faith – which will lead to our Salvation. Christ was “born, dead, risen again, taken up (ortus, mortuus, resuscitatus, assumptus)” – we are also born, and will also die, but due to Faith, the parallel will be extended to the final two as well, so that we, *like Him*, will *also* be *raised* and be *taken up*. That is “**when our faith by seeing shall come to be truth** (cum fides nostra uidendo fiet ueritas).” (D.Tr. IV.18.24)

# Chapter V

## The End

### Summary and final thoughts

Due to the need to limit the length of this thesis to no more than 30,800 words, and the necessity of developing the inquiry itself to the greatest extent possible, so as to reach an answer both clear and convincing, this final conclusion will have to be extremely brief. This means that I cannot possibly go into all the wider implications – and there are *many* – of what has here been recalled from the forgetfulness of history, not to mention embark on a detailed analysis of the extensive disagreement between, on the one side, ancient Platonism and Platonic Christianity, and, on the other, Modernity and its *inevitable* progeny, Post-Modernity. Still, I will attempt to at least mention *some* of the more prominent issues which this investigation has brought to the fore, directly as well as indirectly.

If we begin with a return to the initial research question, I am painfully aware of the fact that this thesis really only *scratches the surface* of the subject of contact and communication between human beings and the Divine. Still, I would say that what has been uncovered *is* significant, and worthy of attention. As regards myself, I set out on this mental journey, approximately one year ago now, with the supposition that Plato's Nous is an *innate, human* mental faculty or power, and that Intellect is an acceptable, albeit inadequate, translation of the term used to refer to it. How mired I was in ignorance! Now I have begun to gain some *Understanding* of the subject, but I am still as far from Knowledge as a lonely ancient sailor glimpsing, in the darkness of the tempestuous night, the fire of a lighthouse from afar.

In sum, it has amply demonstrated, *if* we accept the testimonies of Plato of Athens and St. Augustine of Hippo, that human beings *are*, generally speaking, endowed with a *suprarational* faculty, *but*, contrary to widely held opinions, that faculty is *not* Nous and *not* Intellect, but the Eye of the Soul, which is an immaterial, *spiritual* Organ of Vision, *akin* to the physical eye, but *far superior* to it in terms of what it is *potentially* capable of seeing.

I say *potentially*, for by itself, in its natural state, and if left to its own devices, this Eye of the Soul is *helpless*, and incapable of apprehending the Divine. It is *only* when this Eye has been purified of the flickering phantasms of Temporal Becoming, and turned towards the Eternal Genera of Higher Being, and is penetrated and filled by *Divine Light*, which is *potential*, *energetic* Nous, and which *I* conclude is identical to the Divine Entity Christianity has named the Holy Spirit, that the *latent* ability of the Visual Organ of the Soul is *actualized*, and the event of Sight, of Vision, of the Joyous Contemplation of the Divine, at last takes place.

This event or state of *supernatural*, *suprarational seeing* is, in a certain sense, *also* Nous, but now it is Nous *realized*, Nous *received*, in the breathtaking, ecstatic *marriage* (as one might call it) of the human Soul with *the Idea* of the Good, the Provider of Nous, *whom I* conclude is probably identical to the Eternal Word – and I say “whom” consciously, for Higher Being or Eternity is not at all a mere impersonal, static, lifeless “storehouse” of “forms” (c.f. what Plato lets the Stranger from Elea say to Theaetetus in *Sophist* 248e–249b), but a realm of *Ousia*, of *Essence*, and therefore of *Vitality* and *Consciousness*, as the etymologies of both *Ousia* and *Essence* strongly indicate. For Higher *Being* is the Realm of just that, *Pure Being*, in the sense of “I am”, and “I am” is the apex and essence of Consciousness.

Concerning the *event* of Nous, of the *seeing* of some or all of the Eternal Ideas of Higher Being, it is *this* which gives rise to True, Objective *Knowledge*, Plato’s *Episteme*, which

is Wisdom *received* (as opposed to Wisdom *itself*). In *this life*, such Knowledge or Wisdom is the unforgettable *memory* of contemplative encounters with the Divine, but in the Eternal Life *after* this life of the Saved and the Just, it is the *continually received Insight* resulting from *uninterrupted Communion* with the Eternal Word, the Wisdom of God – in Christian tradition often called *the Beatific Vision*. (For evidence of how the Beatific Vision was traditionally viewed by the Church in Western Europe, see: Schaff, 1924, pp. 69–70.)

This, then, very briefly put, is how Plato and St. Augustine conceived of the relationship between the human being and the Divine. However, if the reader carefully considers the nature of this relationship, as well as the ways those eminent ancient sages defined and employed the central terms discussed in this thesis – both the ones just mentioned and others – and then compares the picture thus painted to the one now surrounding us on all sides, so to speak, particularly in the dominant popular culture and the commonplace educational systems in the West, but also in much of recent philosophy, I think that he or she will begin to see a certain *pattern* emerge, namely one of *inversion* and *role reversal* (a phenomenon commented on by C. S. Lewis (2014, p. 263) in his essay “God in the Dock”).

To put it somewhat hyperbolically: Being has been turned into Becoming, and Becoming into Being (not in actuality, of course, but in the realm of human *Opinion*), in the sense that the world of matter and of the five physical senses, the empirical world, is portrayed as the *only* fully *real* reality there is, while the metaphysical and supernatural (here meaning that which is *above* or *beyond* material, physical nature) is viewed as largely *unreal*, as a phantasm, a figment of the imagination.

In a similar fashion, Knowledge has become mere Opinion – as when even the most well-attested and time-honored metaphysical concepts are dismissed out of hand by Empiricist Exclusivists as “meaningless” or “unscientific” – while Opinion, the realm of the

naturalistic, world-oriented sciences, has been elevated to the status of Objective Knowledge, or to the closest thing to such Knowledge attainable.

One of the more appalling consequences of the above mentioned aspects of Modernity is that the value of the human individual is well nigh obliterated, since a human being is reduced to nothing more than a curious, bipedal aggregate of chemical reactions, the result of nothing but than a long succession of coincidences, which holds together, at most, for about 80 or 90 short years, and then vanishes forever. But what is even worse, perhaps, is that the inversion and role reversal effectively cuts us off from the one and only possible Source of a resilient, satisfying meaning, a truly inspiring hope and an authentic, lasting joy. The result is a world which is increasingly dreary, and also fundamentally unsustainable. Many no longer see any good reason to manifest Beauty in the world, let alone procreate. The salt has lost its flavor, it seems (Matthew 5:13).

Nevertheless, I see an immense yearning among large swathes of the youth of today – the kind of yearning for something more and greater and more fulfilling which I felt so intensely when I was young, but which then seemed very rare. Many do not know exactly what it is that they are longing for – how could they – let alone how to satisfy their longing in a sound and lasting way, but many also have an *inkling*, at least, of what it is that they have been deprived of. It remains to be seen if anything substantial will come of it, but, in the long run, I doubt that the human yearning for transcendence, and for God, can be suppressed. For, as St. Augustine observes:

“(…) thou hast made us for thyself and **restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.**” (Conf. I.1.1)

Blaise Pascal expresses the same sentiment, but in more detail, when he says that

“(…) the present never satisfies us (…) since **this infinite abyss [the void in the human heart] can be filled only (...) by God himself.**” (2003, p. 45)

Lastly, both are joined by C. S. Lewis, when he states that

**“(...) the essence of [true] religion (...) is the thirst for an end higher than natural ends.”** (2014, p. 137)

However that may be, I see only two possible final outcomes of the present situation – *either* we recover a way of life which *reconnects* us with God and Higher Being, Beauty and Mystery, *or* we slowly perish, irretrievably lost in a vast, expanding desert of our own making, from which not even the Lord will be able to rescue us – and it was the hope that it might still be the former prospect which is realized, and not the latter, which caused this thesis to come into being.



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